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Foxfire 3

Edited by: Eliot Wigginton

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Foxfire 3

**animal care, banjos and dulcimers, hide tanning,
summer and fall wild plant foods, butter churns,
ginseng, and still more affairs of plain living.**

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edited with an introduction by
ELIOT WIGGINTON

Anchor Books
Anchor Press/Doubleday
Garden City, New York
1975

Eliot Wigginton, faculty adviser to *Foxfire* magazine, teaches journalism at the Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School in Georgia. "Wig," as he is known to his students, is currently working with IDEAS, Inc. to extend the *Foxfire* concept of education and oral history to other communities.

The Anchor Press edition is the first publication of *Foxfire 3* in book form. It is published simultaneously in hard and paper covers.

Title page photo courtesy of Dorothy Hill

Portions of this book first appeared in *Foxfire* magazine.
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Printed in the United States of America

This book is dedicated to those adults who love young people and demonstrate that affection every day. Without these men and women, the love already deep within all kids would shrivel, for it would have no pattern to go by.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Foxfire continues to be a fresh, exciting experience for all of us because of the basic generosity and good will that run strong and deep within most people.

The parents in the county and the administration of our school continue to trust us with kids. Recently, for example, I took two students (neither of whom had ever flown before) on a week-long trip that leapfrogged us all over the country—they were students whose parents had never met me but who willingly gave their permission.

Residents of the area still greet us enthusiastically when we come to intrude into their lives with cameras and tape recorders. As we were winding up an interview not long ago, the lady whose husband we had been questioning disappeared into the kitchen and reappeared with four pies she had baked especially for our visit; and she insisted that what the kids couldn't eat there, they had to take home with them.

Members of our Board of Directors and Advisory Boards continue to find ways to give us a hand and urge us on—people like John Viener, for example, who put in scores of hours dealing with unpleasant chores like straightening out all our insurance needs and getting those attended to, trademarking our name, and attending meeting after meeting in our behalf.

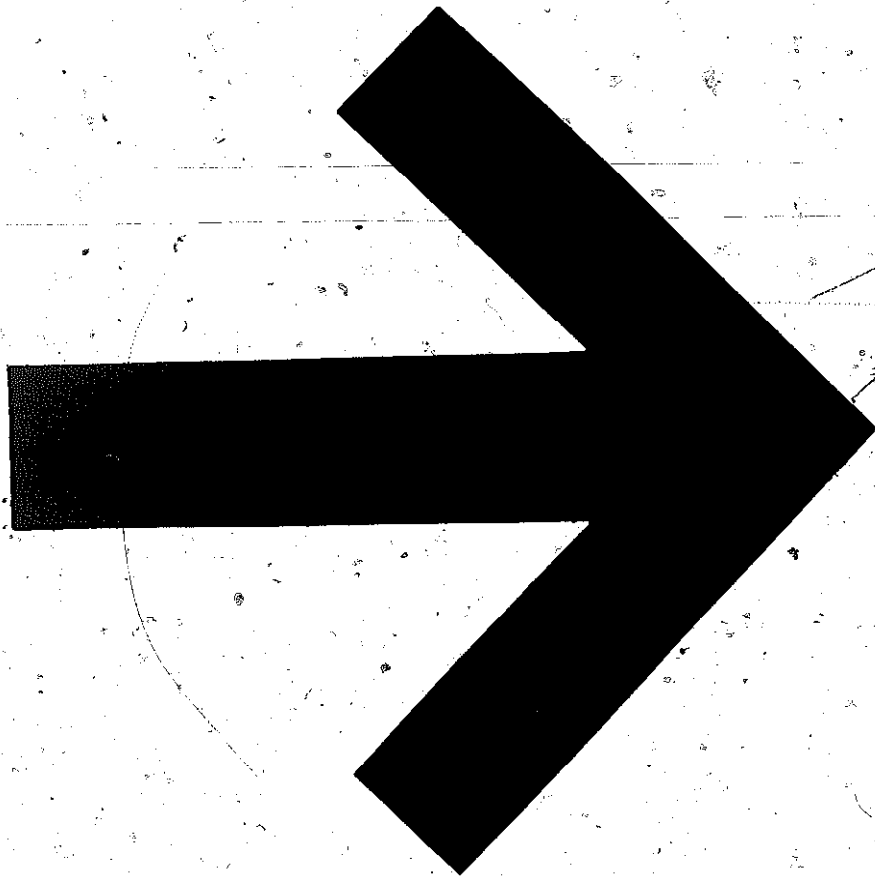
Old friends from the beginning (and there are lots of them), like Junius Eddy, lie low for a while and suddenly reappear bearing some new gift or piece of news, and you realize with a rush that they've been out there quietly working behind the scenes to make some fine new thing happen for you or the project.

New friends appear—like A. K. Johnson of the Georgia Bicentennial Commission, who urged his commission to sponsor two of the log buildings in our reconstruction—or Peter Haratonik of the Center for Understanding Media who sent Chuck Anderson down to Rabun Gap for a week to help us get our video project off the ground.

And always there are the kids—new ones every year with new ideas, fresh enthusiasm, and different demands and needs—keeping us, in turn, fresh, flexible, and enthusiastic.

With resources like that behind *Foxfire*, it's hard to be anything but strong.

BEW



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INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1976, *Foxfire* magazine will be ten years old. By all the normal standards of measurement, we should have plenty to celebrate, for *Foxfire* has not only survived, but is being called one of the most dramatically successful high school projects in sight.

By 1976, our first book will have sold well over a million copies. The second book will be right behind it. The telephone in our office rings constantly, bringing requests from film and TV producers, advertising executives, and free-lance writers and photographers. I receive hundreds of letters a year inviting me to speak before various organizations, serve on various boards, lend my name to various proposals or proposed proposals, or accept various jobs. Scores of visitors come through our tiny office with no more reason than "just wanting to see where it's done," or wanting us to introduce them to some "real mountain people." Not long ago, a stranger came huffing the half mile up the mountain to my log house, where a couple of kids and I were spending a Saturday adding a porch, took a picture of us with his Instamatic, and then struggled back down the mountain.

I accept several invitations a year to speak. Almost invariably in the question-and-answer period that follows the presentation, the same question comes up. It goes something like this: "Did you ever dream when you started the project that all this success would happen?"

I usually laugh and answer, "No, never." And that's true. I sometimes don't see how we made it past our second issue. But at a recent talk, something perverse in my character or my mood made me answer, "Say you're a high school teacher who wants to reach his students in a very special way. You start a project with them, and in the early days, you all do everything together. When you walk across the campus, as often as not a kid will come charging up from behind and tackle you, laughing crazily as you roll, wrestling, scattering books and papers across the grass.

Your project prospers. Your name is in lots of papers and before lots of folks. You come back on campus after a successful four-day speaking engagement, and a kid stands before you looking down, scuffing his feet at something imaginary in the dirt, and says, 'Gee, you're not around much any more.'

'Are you still successful? Do you have anything to rejoice about except notoriety and a stack of invitations? Is that success?'

I think about that a lot now that we're besieged. And I'm finding out, like lots of others before me (some of whom warned me in advance), that success, interestingly enough, turns out to be a mixed blessing. It's bright with opportunity, but it's also jammed up with problems—a lot like walking around town with a rattlesnake in your front pocket.

It's an old story. I've read about it in various books and magazines. I've seen it at work on other people. I never really expected to have to deal with it personally, but here I am, writing this in Room 219 of the Great Smokies Hilton in Asheville instead of at my cluttered desk, because there are too many distractions at home.

Visibility presents rather fragile organizations like ours with a number of problems. Some examples: When a group that's used to getting 3 letters a day suddenly begins to get 40 a day (something like 14,000 a year), and has to answer them with a staff of high school students that can only work on the project part time, and they have a number of other activities that we'd like them to be involved in besides answering letters anyway, then some adjustments are needed. When we run a workshop for teachers interested in implementing the same sort of project in their own locations, and twenty of those teachers ask permission to bring their classes up for a day to see our operation, we know that if we say yes to all of them it's going to mean that the equivalent of *one month* of school days will have been spent giving guided tours instead of writing articles, and that all the groups are going to go away disappointed anyway because all there is to see is a little cluster of three impossibly cramped ten-foot-by-ten-foot rooms cluttered with typewriters and envelopes and paper (we can't take them to visit contacts—you can't fit a whole class into the tiny living room of a mountain home). Yet we know that if we say no to them, we run the risk of seeming brusque and unco-operative and cold, and here we are again—stuck between a rock and a hard place. You get the idea.

So it's been pretty interesting around here for the last year or two. Margie, Suzy, Pat, and I, as a staff, have learned a lot, and we're slowly beginning to develop some techniques for coping; trying to stay positive and helpful whenever we can, but also trying to keep foremost in our minds that image of a kid, disappointed, scuffing his feet in the dirt.

INTRODUCTION

The problem, of course, becomes to figure out a way to grab that thing called success, shake it up, turn it inside out, and make it work for us instead of letting it eat us alive. Here's the system we've devised for the moment. It seems to be working in the biggest areas of concern.

The first area is that I jokingly tag the "I know you're busy, but . . ." department since we hear that line many times a day. If the request asks me to come and speak, I ask a couple of questions in return. Is the group that's inviting me willing, for example, to foot not only my expenses, but also those of two or three of the students? If they aren't, I usually don't go. Is the group asking us for some specific input, or is it looking for entertainment? If it's a group of English teachers from the state of North Carolina that are really looking for some ways to get their kids involved; or a high school in Parkersburg, West Virginia, that wants to start a similar project and wants me to come and help get it off the ground; if we can spare the time away from the office, and if it's not during one of those months we periodically set aside *just* for the kids here and let nothing else interfere, then we might go. On the other hand, if it's a group that is a four-hour drive away, and just wants a little after-luncheon presentation to fill a hole in the program chairman's calendar, which for us means a full day away from the office with a good chance that little will be accomplished, we don't go. If it's a local group within our or an immediately adjacent county, we almost always go because we feel it's vital that people in our area know what we're up to.

Using this system, we can get most of the student editors out on at least one good trip (after they've all been once, we usually turn down everything else until the next school year), and we find that some fine things often happen on those trips that add yet another dimension to our program. On numbers of occasions, for example, the kids we've taken with us have never been on a plane before, have never encountered a hotel elevator, revolving doors, escalators, and have never been entertained at a sit-down dinner. They've just never had the chance. Nor have they previously been put into situations where they're asked for autographs, or where they're asked to address a group that may be as large as several thousand people, or where they're asked by teachers for *their* advice as to how teachers should teach, or what it's really like to be a high school student. I've seen them stunned again and again by the fact that adults are asking *their* opinions on certain issues and are seriously considering, accepting, or challenging their answers in a healthy, friendly exchange of views. We try to pull out all the stops on a trip and give completely of ourselves to the sponsoring group. As a result, many of the students we take are put in situations where they have to think seriously about our project—what it's all about and precisely how it works—because they're going to have to

articulate all that to people who have never been here. Suddenly they find themselves not only with a new understanding of who, in part, their audience out there is, and a new understanding of the fact that lots of people they've never met before *are* watching their work; but they also find themselves evaluating the work they're doing and the whole *Foxfire* project in a new, more serious, and more objective light. Even if the end result of the visit is that nothing specific is accomplished by being there, the kids, at least, come back having had a solid, sobering experience—and often come back, newly recharged and committed, thinking of ways to alter our operation here at home to better serve the other kids, the audience that's waiting for their next magazine, and the community in which they work.

If the request is from an organization that wants to come here and do some filming or some photography, certain other questions come into play, all of which lead up to the big question: into what position is the request going to put the people who might be filmed or photographed? What's in it for them besides publicity that might bring people trooping to their doors, and do they want to be put in that position? But first, the class as a whole decides whether or not they will be willing at the time designated to work closely with a camera crew (if the crew doesn't want the kids around, but simply wants introductions, we don't even consider it). If the kids have recently been through such an experience, and they don't want to gear up to do it all over again, or if they're involved in so many things that they don't feel they can take the time, the project is vetoed.

If, however, they are interested in looking at the project more closely and perhaps want to do it, they ask for more details. For example, the JFG Coffee Company recently decided that it needed a new set of commercials, and Fitzgerald Advertising, Inc., was hired to make them. The plan was to make six commercials, each featuring a mountain person (the JFG marketing area covers much of the southern Appalachians) demonstrating some skill. At the end of the thirty-second scene, all the person had to say was something to the effect that, "It take a lot of skill and patience to do this." Then the announcer would come in and say, "Just as it takes this person time and patience to make butter, so, too, it takes JFG time and patience to make a fine coffee." Something like that.

Thinking they might be able to save filming time, and save trouble, they approached us and asked if we would be willing to locate the subjects for the commercials and prepare them so that all the film crew had to do was walk in, film the six scenes in four days, and walk out. It sounded unsavory at first, but we told them the kids might be willing to do it. They

would simply have to come up and present their case and let the kids decide.

The writer and producer flew up from New Orleans, and I gave them a class period to present their story boards to the kids and answer questions. The kids wanted to know if *Foxfire*'s name would be used (they didn't want it to be), or if the name of the county would be used (they didn't want that either after seeing the number of tourists that came through as a result of the movie *Deliverance*), or if the contact would have to drink some coffee (they didn't want that). They also wanted to know how much each would be paid, how long they would have to work, etc. They grilled the ad agency representatives for an hour, then told them they would talk about it among themselves and let the agency know next week.

For several days, that was all they talked about. Finally they decided that they'd co-operate if they could find people in the community who *wanted* to do it. They headed out to locate a butter churner, a beekeeper, a man who would plow with a horse, some quilters, a weaver, and someone who would dig sassafras and make tea with it—all skills the ad agency wanted pictured. In two days they had found them all, and they called the agency and said that they could come in if they paid the people in cash just as soon as the cameras stopped rolling, would give us copies of the finished commercials for our archive, and would pay for a community showing.

The agency agreed, came in, and the kids had it set up so they got all they came for in less than four days. The contacts got paid on the spot, and everyone was happy. One of the contacts, for example, came up to the kids afterward and said, "I just want you all to know that I am grateful to you for thinking of me. That's the most money I ever made at one time in my life. That will pay for my seed and fertilizer this year and put me in the black for the first time in years." The party was held, and over a hundred people came to watch the finished commercials before they were to start airing, and they approved. And later, when one of the subjects was bitten by a copperhead, the ad agency sent up a donation to help with the hospital expenses.

Another recent request was from a production company that wanted to film a two-hour television special here. The film would tell the fictionalized story of a boy who came from a city, got involved in a project like *Foxfire*, and through that involvement came to some new understanding about himself and his heritage. The project went through several months of negotiations; script writers even came from California with a sample script in hand, and in the end was not agreed to because the kids insisted that the film should not be called *Foxfire*, nor could the project shown in the

film be called *Foxfire*, since the story itself was fictionalized and had never happened here and since our name would pinpoint the location geographically. The company, having already made a number of concessions, balked at that one, and the contract was never signed. I have friends who think that the kids, in that case, made a mistake. Whether they actually did or not is somewhat beside the point. The fact is that they made a decision that they believed in after weeks of real deliberation, and that decision was adhered to even though I personally thought (and told them I thought) that making the film might be a fine educational experience, might be a chance for us to provide an antidote to *Deliverance*, and might be a fine chance for us to help shape what could be a genuinely exciting television offering. In the end, the experience the students went through in the act of having to come to their decision was probably enough. And it was a weighty experience for me personally to watch them at work, see the intensity of their commitment to our project and our community, and see the seriousness with which they deliberated as to how they felt both the project and the community should be allowed to be used by others.

In another vein, if the request is from a person or group that wants to come and visit and be taken by us to meet some of the people we've written about, we turn it down. From the beginning, our hope was that our project would, in part, encourage others to begin to look in their own back yards for the riches that are there, and for the experiences that can come from that involvement with a community. Every neighborhood has its own Aunt Aries and its own kids that could easily be put in touch with them. When people want, instead, to come here and be given a guided tour, we've failed, in a sense, to accomplish part of what we set out to do. We have no intention of putting our contacts on public display, or running bus tours past their homes. That's not only degrading but dehumanizing.

On the other hand, if the request is from a person or group that wants to come and work with the kids, get (or give) ideas, engage them in some serious discussions, or perhaps try to implement the same sort of project back home, then we read the letter in class. If some kids want to host the group and really set up a first-rate visit, we give those kids the letter, and from that point on, it's their responsibility. One of them writes the group back, tells them to come ahead, works out the dates and details, and hosts the group when it arrives. If there are no kids who want to take it on, we write back with our apologies. The alternative (and we know this from bitter experience) is two or three groups a day coming through, no work done here, and, after a time, zero educational experiences for the students involved. The last thing we want is to see them turned into the equivalent of the bored, faceless guides at places like Mammoth Cave.

To handle the requests for craft items the contacts make, the kids each

year set up a team that will take the letters, pick up the items, give the contacts the full purchase price, bring the items back, and wrap and ship them at our expense. It's one of many services we try to provide for our contacts as part of our attempt to thank them for the time they've spent with us. The kids get a good sense, through activities like these, of what it's like to give of themselves and use part of their resources to help others.

If the request is for a job with us, we don't usually consider it unless it comes from a community person, or a kid who used to work with us, has just finished college, and wants to come back home. If the request is for us to consider a manuscript for publication in the magazine, we turn it down, because the kids write all the articles. On the other hand, if someone writes in and wants us to find and take a picture of their grandfather's grave, or wants us to provide additional details about something we wrote, or wants other specific information and we have a kid who wants to track that down, we turn it over to him. If we don't have anyone with the time, we usually write back, tell them we're holding the request, and wait until a kid comes along who wants to tackle it. Theoretically, each student should be held responsible for his article and for any questions from readers that it may stimulate. The problem in our case is that by the time the article comes out in book form and begins to draw questions, the kid has already graduated from our school and is out in the world somewhere.

In some cases, we feel that the request really deserves attention whether or not there is a student to handle it. In those cases, we as a staff take it on ourselves on our own free time. By and large, however, the general rule is that if we can't turn what comes through the office into a true learning experience for some students here, then there's no room for it. The alternative is to be swamped, and to watch the main goals of our work go down the drain.

The second area of success is money, and again the question becomes that of how the income can be taken and used by the kids so they can learn and accomplish something in the process. Everyone wants it. Who's going to get it? And who's it going to be given by?

Some time ago, we set up a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation with our own Board of Directors, Advisory Boards, lawyer, etc. The corporation exists within the school as a separate organization. All of the income goes into the corporate account. A portion of it is used to pay the staff members who work with the kids, to pay the salaries of the many kids we hire full time to work with us during the summers, to buy equipment and supplies, pay our printing and postage and telephone bills, give scholarships or loans to our kids who want to go on to college and can't otherwise, pay expenses on extended collecting trips into the mountains, and so on.

Beyond those expenses, the students are encouraged to try to come up with responsible, useful ways in which the balance of the money can be invested to provide income to continue the project long after the book royalties have dried up; be returned to the community in which we work; be donated to worthy groups; or be used to help out our contacts.

Two years ago, for example, the students voted to purchase a fifty-acre piece of property to which they wished to move and then reconstruct about twenty endangered log buildings. A check for \$35,000 was written to pay for the land, and a fourteen-year-old kid signed it. Millard Buchanan, a retired logger in the community, was hired as foreman; and with him in charge, a collection of community people and students began, in April of 1974, to move the buildings. By Christmas, they had seven log buildings and two barns up and under new roofs. This year, approximately ten more cabins will be added. Then, for years to come, new groups of community kids will be engaged in doing the required finishing work.

The area is divided into three groups of buildings. One area is set aside for the collection of artifacts (looms, spinning wheels, wagons, tools, etc.) the project has amassed over the years. Here, new groups of kids can actually use the collection themselves, or they can borrow from it to take supplies to a contact they've found who can show them how to make an object, but has long since parted with his tools and materials.

The second area will house, in separate buildings, our collection of audio tapes, photographs, videotape, and film. Each building will, aside from the collection, also contain working/editing studios. In the videotape cabin, for example, will be the editing decks and equipment the students use for producing the shows they film, edit, and broadcast on a weekly basis over the local cable TV network. Using equipment they've purchased themselves with book royalties, the kids produce shows that range from basketball games, to community group discussions of local issues, to *Foxfire* interviews that bring the pages of the magazine to life—all shows that we all hope give our community a new sense of unity and interdependence while teaching the kids some very professional skills.

The third group of buildings will be set aside and furnished so that people who attend workshops, conferences, or board meetings that the kids host will have accommodations; or so additional staff members who want to work with us for short periods of time will be able to settle in right away in rent-free housing.

The remainder of the land—some forty acres—will be used as an environmental laboratory for all the students in the area.

The students have decided—in what will doubtless be greeted as an unpopular decision—that the project will be closed to the general traveling public. There are many historic restorations in the mountains that people

one of our buildings and breaks his back?" "What happens if I suddenly find that more and more of my creative energy is going into the maintenance, care, and feeding of the beast itself than into the projects, or into insuring the flexibility, responsiveness, and creativity of the group as the needs of kids change from year to year?"

We've all seen it happen. A great idea (like a public school system) is somehow transformed into a grotesque, clanking, rust-encrusted machine, the basic maintenance of which saps everyone's time and energy to the detriment of the original goals. Or someone founds a great organization only to find himself afraid that not a single other person can run it nearly as well; when senility strikes years later, the individual has made no plans for the organization's survival, or for a hand-picked successor to carry on, and the whole thing collapses with a sigh.

And it's not enough to say, "Let it all take care of itself." It won't. In our case, who gets our land? Let that take care of itself, and it falls into the hands of a Florida land developer. Who gets our continuing royalties from the sale of the books? Let that take care of itself and the IRS snatches it. Who gets our archives and our collection? Let that take care of itself, and every antique dealer around has a field day.

It's not the problem of whether or not the stuff will be disposed of. It's how it will be disposed of if something goes awry. Without some attention to those details, it could all fall into the hands of the vultures who wait on the sidelines, cheering, and then move in to get a free ride off our sweat and toil, make money off what we've done, and leave the kids by the wayside wondering just what the hell happened.

We've tried to cover all that. Early, talented graduates of our school have been and are being brought back from college as full-time employees and board members. Money has been set aside to guarantee salaries. Liability insurance packages have been set up. Luckily, the kids guarantee our responsiveness and flexibility just because they are kids, and we care about them deeply—there's a new group of them every year, fresh and demanding, clamoring to step in and take over.

If all else fails, there are documents that will insure that equipment will be given to appropriate groups, and the restoration will go to the county as our way of thanking its residents for being so patient and co-operative with us. And at the very least, we can all rest secure knowing that a number of kids who worked with us were able to share and help direct a great experiment that took them, for a time, far beyond their ordinary high school fare. And that's something. But I'm counting on the belief that we can do even better than that, and I'm working toward it.

Beyond all this, of course, is the ego-burden success can place on a person's head. Groups approach me, convinced that I am something I know

that I am not. Convinced that I came to the mountains with the whole grand scheme intact like a symphony in my mind. And, most distressingly, convinced that it was so brilliantly executed tactically that they could never duplicate it themselves.

That's all baloney. The whole thing was a series of both fortunate accidents (having a fraternity brother at Doubleday, for example, who set up *The Foxfire Book*; or meeting the IDEAS folks completely by accident one day in Washington), and tiny, day-by-day responses to the needs of a group of kids that gradually gave us the shape and form we now have.

The whole thing is now being duplicated so many times (thanks to the help and persistence of IDEAS, which has used our kids as consultants to help start similar projects in places from Maine to Missouri, from Alaska to Hawaii, and which is now making available a complete printed package that details to any interested group the educational philosophy and the various skills and tips helpful to know in pulling it off) that it is now obvious that all manner of individuals, institutions, and informal groupings of good people can get something similar going in their own locations if they just want to badly enough.

I keep reminding myself of all that.

The ever-present collection of people seeking autographs can change a person's head, but the kids are really helpful there. As folks come up, the kids often nudge me from behind and whisper something like, "Think you're a big deal don't you?" And I keep reminding myself that we, as a staff, are guests in this school, and that we could be asked to leave at any time if things went awry. That, of course, would be our death—we would no longer have access to the students, and there would no longer be any reason to continue. All these facts help keep success in some sort of perspective, and that's vital.

Is it going to work? I think so, I think we're going to be okay. Because yesterday, as I was walking across campus, two kids tackled me and the books and papers I was carrying were suddenly scattered across the grass.

BEW



PLATE I

SIMMIE FREE

We had heard of Simmie Free long before we first met him. He was the feisty, good-humored little man—laughed at by some, but far more often laughed along with—that you'd see once in a while on the streets of town with a little half-full half-pint bottle stuck in the left hip pocket of his overalls. Usually he was making the rounds of those who enjoyed his company—A. W. Adams in the bank, for example, or some of the boys down at the courthouse.

He had a reputation as a retired moonshiner who used to make some of the best liquor in the region. So three of us went to meet him, initially to talk about moonshining. As we bounded across the little wooden bridge on the dirt road to the three-room house he and his wife, Annie, live in, he appeared on the porch, waved hello to us with an expansive, warm salute, and was soon leading us proudly through the woods along a dry creek bed littered with barrel hoops and staves from previous operations to show us the snail-shell furnace hidden up behind his house where he made his last batch of pure corn. "The law came and got my copper pot," he roared, "and they didn't even ask me could they. And they never even brought it back, the damn fools! That's wrong to take a man's stuff and not ask him." Then he sneaked a quick look at us to see whether or not we were catching onto his brand of humor, and, seeing that we were grinning at each other, burst out into delighted, infectious laughter. He had us hooked, and every half-dozen steps he'd pause, gesture at something with his stick, and then hit us with another polished one-liner:

"We had a good sheriff then. He'd put me up free every Saturday night!"

"I can't get around as well as them young boys. Know why? 'Cause I'm older than they are!"

"See those turnips there? Get you some. Won't cost you nothing. My

name's Free, and they are too! I don't eat turnips raw. Know why? 'Cause I don't have a tooth in my head! Watch out! I'll tell lots a' jokes on y'."

"Them briars is little, but they're like I am. They can sting y'!"

"Man tried to buy my land but I wouldn't sell. Said I couldn't use the money. He asked me what I was goin' t' do with all that land. Said, 'Hell, I'm goin' t' carry it with me!'"

"Know why that corn's so high? It's them sob's goin' t' th'moon. That corn's just took out after 'em!"

"Me and him's a little kin, but that ain't worth nothin'. I got some kin as mean as ever drawed a breath. They're honest, but they'll claw your eyes out!"

On the third visit, we were paraded into the living room, where seats were waiting for us, and were greeted with, "Today we're not going to talk about moonshining. Today we're going to talk about hunting." And for hours he filled us with hunting tales.

Recently Annie had a heart attack, and the eighty-two-year-old Simmie had one shortly thereafter. "I was hoein' my tomatoes and all of a sudden it hit me and there I was with my face stuck in th'ground. I reckon I was tryin' to hoe with my nose!"

The last time we visited, they were both back at home, weakened, but full of fun. "Me and her, we have a big time here together."

We're honored that they allow us to share in that.

Interviews and photos by Ray McBride, Don MacNeil, and Gary Turner.

MOONSHINER

Simmie was born on his grandfather's place in Turnerville, Georgia, on January 14, 1892. ("Pa said at five o'clock, and I couldn't argue. I wouldn't of argued to him anyhow. He would have given me a whippin'. That's the way it goes.") His father never owned a piece of land. He lived, raised his fifteen children, and died (at the age of 109) on rented land.

For many years after he was grown and married, Simmie didn't own land either, and moved from place to place, job to job, trying to keep his family supported. They were constantly on the move. They lived, for example, for a short time on his brother Willie's land near the Macedonia Church. "Two of my children are layin' over there right now: Willie and Catherine, they're restin' and will be all right. We've got their graves fixed up as good as anybody could have it. Anyhow, they're over there. That flu epidemic of 1919 like to killed us all. Come damn near killin' me. I held

out that the only thing that kept me alive was just saying, 'I ain't gonna die!' Don't never say you're gonna die. If you do, you're shore as hell gonna die. Just don't give up. They was four people layin' at Macedonia Church and nobody to bury 'em or nothin'. Me in the bed with double pneumonia fever and not able to go nor nothin', or nobody else hardly. I'll tell you them was bad times. That 1919 was the awfullest time I ever see'd in my life."

Six weeks after he was married, he had to serve eight months in the Gainesville jail for making moonshine, and when he was released, he and Annie lived at his father-in-law's apple orchard in Habersham County, where he worked for ten cents an hour. "I kept on working for a good long while before I done anything else. Then I took government training about pruning apple trees. I went to working in the orchard and I went ahead and had an expert pruner teach me how to prune. And I stayed with him for a right smart while. I don't know how long I worked there. It got time in the weather that I didn't have much pruning to do there because we had most of it done on his orchard. And there was a feller named Frank Garrison that was up there on the Habersham Orchard just about a mile and three quarter from there. Habersham Orchard was the name of it. I went up there and I don't know how long I stayed up there; stayed up there a long time with Frank Garrison, a mighty fine guy to work for. And that's when our oldest boy was born, Grover. Then I moved back down to my daddy-in-law's. Stayed there a long time. Then another one of our boys was born, Lewis, our second boy. He was born there, and then we moved from there too."

Several orchards, a sawmill, and a son (Harvey) later found Simmie and his family in North Carolina where they moved from Moses Creek in Jackson County to Franklin, Dillsboro, Sylva, Cullowhee, a Blackwood lumber company sawmill, Chaney Fork, and finally to Rich Mountain, where he found another job getting out acid wood. "The boss got me to takin' over the loading of acid wood cars. I had me two hands but I was the one seein' to it, you know. The wood was a comin' five to six, maybe eight miles by water. And it would come in there in a flume—two planks nailed together. We had to make our flumes and everything—make it curve and go down—make it so water would just fly in it to haul the wood. And you could get on a log and ride. I had some that worked for me did do it. Find a place and they could ride for half a mile nearly. Just get on a big stick of acid wood and just sit on it and the water would just push 'em. Then they'd have to get out and walk back. I seen a feller—one of the Parker boys—he was riding by himself and was holding onto the stick right behind him and the wood had jammed behind him and he didn't know it. He was holding on with his hands and had his fingers

down in again' the end of the wood. And the jam had turned loose above there and it came right down in there and hit his two fingers and cut them off just like you had taken a knife and cut them off.

"You could get just as wet as water could be. When you got there, it was just like gettin' down in the creek and staying there. The wood would come and fall right in the [railroad] car. Well, we'd go three cars ever' day. That was a day's work. And them two fellers—one in one end of the car and the other in the other—and me watchin' so if they got a car loaded and wood went to pile up on'em, I'd throw the stop in and put the wood out on the ground. Then let 'em catch up with me and pull the stop out and let the wood go right on in the next car. We'd load three cars a day. I worked there for over a year in the acid wood business. They was a lot of people come up from Georgia to work with me. That water didn't suit everybody—didn't suit me—but I was in it just the same as they was. And in the winter time, they wasn't no need in havin' rubber clothes but we did have. When I'd go to take off my overclothes—rubber clothes you know—they'd be so cold they'd be froze. They'd just stand there. Froze just as hard as they could freeze. I believe that's one thing that's causing me to have arthritis so bad today. Mountain water up in there on them Balsam Mountains *stays* cold. I made thirty-five cents an hour there."

Several moves later, the family settled two miles above the Tuckaseegee, North Carolina, post office. "We lived about two mile from there, on Ben Harris' place. That's where I had to go to buy my groceries and get our mail from. We stayed up there, I reckon a year. One of my boys, my third boy then, took th'pneumonia fever, and I had to walk from Ben Harris' place plumb to Sylva—forty mile. Had to walk ever' step of it to get a doctor. And th'doctor weighed 'bout three hundred pound. Big Doc Nichols. He 'uz big enough!

"And so I went down there and got him. He said, 'Well, Mr. Free, it'll cost ya' a dollar a mile, and it's forty-two mile!' And I said, 'Yeah.' I knowed it was that far.

"I said, 'I ain't a'carin' what it costs. I want you to go up there and see what you can do for him. I believe he's got pneumonia fever. I've had it myself several times, and I believe he's got it.' He just got in his car—had a special car built for him—and I just nearly had to stay half-way on part a'one a'his legs to get in. He drove up there then—back home.

"Well, when I got back home, he doctored my boy, and give medicine enough to do, I don't know, three or four days. And he said, 'Now if he's not better', I believe it was two days, 'use th'medicine you got and do just like I tell you and he'll get alright.' Well, we was doin' ever'thing we could, just like he was tellin'—way over in there forty mile from nowhere—right

back in th'mountains, too. Plenty of bear and ever'thing right around where we was living. Well, he kept gettin' better and finally got over it.

"I had dogs, and hunted up there lots then; catching coons, foxes, anything for fur. Fur was good then. So I had 'bout six dogs that I hunted with. The doctor had to leave his car about a mile from where I lived. And my dogs followed me back over there [to where the car was parked] and as we went by, we had to pass some old apple trees. Before we got there my dogs had got a animal treed. Up there in them apple trees, the possums had been eatin' apples. They was settin' there treed, and Big Doc Nichols said, 'Boy, I wish I could get a good possum.'

"And I said, 'We'll get one now.' We got there to where they was two up in a apple tree. I went up and got one of 'em down, and I said, 'Have you got a box or anything we can put this one in?'

"He said, 'I may have.' He looked, and he found a sack of some kind. He says, 'I've got a sack.'

"I said, 'That's better'n a box.' I said, 'Let's get this one.' And it was a great big, pretty, fat possum. And put it in a sack, and he held the sack, and I went back up in the apple tree and caught that'un and bringed it down. Put it in th'sack for 'im, and he said, 'Don't you want to keep one?'

"I said, 'No. I have more coons and possums to eat than I've got any use for. I got plenty a'hogs out around my pasture.' I had a place rented, rail fence around it, and I had about forty head a'hogs just a'runnin' out in the woods. I could kill one anytime I got ready, 'cause they was plenty of acorns an' things for 'em to stay fat on. They wasn't like the hogs we got here now. They was raised out in the mountains, and they knowed how to make a livin'. They'd just get fat enough. It was good eatin', too. It wasn't a wild hog, but I mean they was out in the woods. They wasn't scared of me. I could call 'em and they'd come to me and I'd feed 'em when snow was on th'ground.

"I told my wife Annie there, 'Just as quick as Harvey gets able, no more North Carolina for us—we're leavin'.' And sure enough, just as quick as he got to where he could make it and we could get back home alright, we come back. Moved back down here on Windy Hill, right here at Tiger. Just two miles from right here where I'm a'settin'. I went to work for th'Ordinary up here in th'county—Will Smith—he's dead now. Awful good man to work for. Had to work, at that. Took a eight-pound rock hammer beatin' rock in th'road. And I worked at that ten cents a hour, and raised our children. That's all I'd get at the orchard when I went to work up here at this Grassy Mountain Orchard. They was three thousand apple trees up there. I lived up there with the boss for seven year—had th'land cleared, and I set out th'apple trees. That orchard now makes th'biggest and th'best apples anywhere in the state of Georgia.

"Took a hurtin' in my shoulders and things—I imagine it was prunin' and doin' so much—I don't know. It might a'been rheumatism. Doctors then called it neuralgia. But it hurt just th'same. Got to where I couldn't press th'pruners enough to cut a big limb. And I see'd I wasn't doin' no good that way. So I told Annie I was gonna' quit, gonna' quit work on the orchard. Go to work making liquor and have me a *home* before I quit or I was goin' to the penitentiary and stay *there*."

In Tiger, they settled into a twenty-four-foot-square chestnut log house. "That's a damned big one-room log house. It was covered flat, and every time it got cloudy anywhere in the world, we could be at home and we'd get wet before the clouds ever got here. Now if you can beat me in tellin' a lie on that, I'd like to know where you come from! And on this land here, broom straw wouldn't grow two feet high. Now, by God, I can grow corn all over it higher than you can reach.

"Anyway, then I went to see old man Duckett's brother who was in Cornelia, Georgia. I said, 'Mr. Duckett, I'm needin' some help and if you want to let me have it, fine. If you don't, you don't.' I was pretty high-tempered back then.

"He said, 'Brother Tom told me it didn't matter what you wanted nor nothin'—to let you have it. He said that if you don't pay for it, he would.'

"So I said, 'Well, that's mighty nice of you, Mr. Duckett, to go ahead and let me have it just on account of your brother said that. You don't know me.'

"He said, 'My brother does.'

"I said, 'Yeah, me and him's had a lot a'dealins' together.'

"Well' he said, 'he told me that, and he said to let you have anything in the world down here that I had that you wanted.'

"I said, 'By God, I can tell you in a few minutes what I want. I want enough lumber dressed and fixed up to build a six-room house! And,' I says, 'I want windows and doors.'

"He went in there and figured it up, counted and everything and said, 'I'll have it up there for you day after tomorrow—\$1,700 worth.' That was a big debt. I knowed I could make it though. I was well and healthy, and I knowed how to do. And I went right ahead and got it and the upper piece of land the same way, and now we don't owe a damned cent on nothin'. I paid some ever' month or two. I just kept workin', kept makin' liquor. [The law] would come in and cut [my stills] up. And I'd run off and leave 'em. I'd come back and just pitch right in and get me another still if I didn't already have it—go in the woods and go right back to work.

"So I don't owe a penny on my land nowhere. I could sell it for a good price [to those] that's seen it but it's not for sale. One feller said anytime

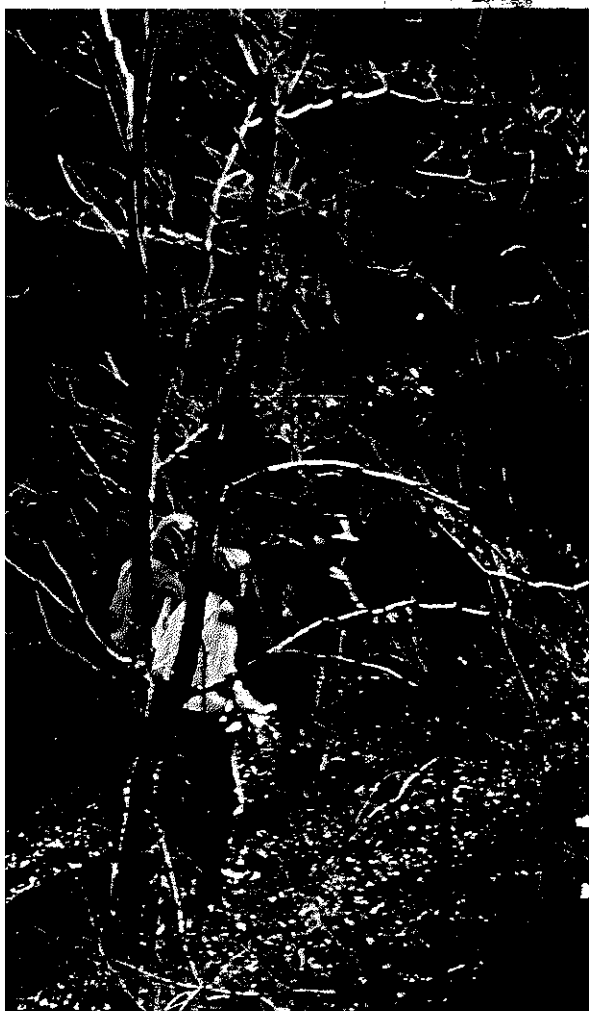


PLATE 2 Ray McBride, Gary Turner, and Simmie on the way to his still furnace.



PLATE 3 Simmie, Ray, and Gary at the furnace.

I got ready to take \$250,000 for it, cash, he'd just hand me th'money. He lives right down here at Tiger—he's got it, and plenty of it. He'd buy it just like it is. Th'land ain't never been measured—just guessed at it being fifty, sixty, might be sixty-five acres. Guesswork's all right if you can make it hit, but sometimes you don't know whether you're gonna guess it just right or not. I got six acres of good bottom land here. But I'm not able to tend it, nor nothin'. I'm gonna have it all turned in a few days. I can raise weeds without work—I can raise them without a bit of effort. That's what I'm gonna do with it if nothin' happens. I ain't gonna sell no land—I'm gonna keep it. We got a good home, and we don't have to sell it. I'm just gonna live here th'rest of my days, and as long as I live and [Annie] lives, we'll both be here. We're gonna stay right here, for it's th'first land we've ever owned in our life, and it's gives us th'big head. We're gonna stay here!"

For Simmie, making liquor just made sense. He could rarely make more than ten cents an hour at regular work, and yet he had land and a house to pay for, and a family to support. With liquor, he could turn his own crop into a commodity that would bring him a dollar a gallon.

The fact that he did make some of the best around is attested to again and again by people who were in the area at the time. The difference between him and many of the others who made it, according to Simmie, was that he never made his only to sell, but to *drink*. He did make money from it, but he drank his share of it too. "You gotta be nice with your liquor—be clean with it and handle it right and don't work it too young. You work it too young and it makes the liquor taste bad and you don't get no turn-out. And then you've ruined it. You gotta make it at the right time.

"There's a lot of people who don't know how to make liquor. They ought to make it [as if it were] for *them*, but they're tryin' to make it for the money. But look here—that's not right. The thing people ought to do is first calm down and say, 'Well, I'm gonna make it honest, straight and right, and I'll live as long as I can and die when I have to.' That's what I say. I don't believe in makin' liquor to kill anybody, do you? I'd make liquor to drink, and if I didn't drink it, I could sell it to somebody and go to bed and not cry about it. I'd know they wouldn't be hurt.

"I made th'best line a'liquor that's ever been made in Rabun County. I tried t'make it honest. Tried t'make it taste as good as I could 'cause I loved it anyhow, and th'better it tastes, the more I could drink. And I've drunken lots of it. God, I wish I had some of that liquor now. I'd give a ten-dollar bill for a gallon of liquor I made then and sold for a dollar. I'd give twenty dollars for a *half* gallon! Directly, I'll go up [on the price] again!

"But too many people make it just for the money. They can kill you! I know, for some come in a damn a'killin' me. It cost me \$487.00 to learn. I bought me a half gallon a'liquor up yonder. It cost me \$6.00, and then it about cost my life. I didn't bother him; never did say a word about it because I wasn't able to. I was about dead. And I'll tell you how he made his liquor. He had four-foot-square boxes—vats I call them, you know—and he took old, beat-up car batteries and worked the beer off with them. Then when he got ready to run it, he had a bloomin' old thing—I don't know what it was, I never saw it. But I used some of the liquor. I give him \$6.00 for a half gallon. I ain't never told his name, but I know where he is. Boy, like to have killed me. Doc Turner sent some to Atlanta and they tested it, and they said they was enough lead in that little bottle to kill six men. Damn, it didn't get me but it like to. Now I believe a man makin' liquor like that *ought* to be caught. I'd say it if I knowed it was my last word. Anybody in the world makes liquor like that should be punished. I had kidney trouble for a long time after that. Cost me \$487.00 in doctor bills. Doc Turner said I was dead. Grover—that's my oldest boy—said I was dead. Another one of them said I was dead. But I wasn't. I ain't quite dead yet, that's th'truth. But it's dangerous.

"Too many that's makin' it just ain't got knowledge enough to know—don't understand it enough to make it right. And all they want to do is just push'er in and make out a great big bunch and get a handful of money. What's money worth to you? Not worth a penny. Money ain't no good to you. What are you going to do with all the money when you die? You know, I read somethin' one time, and it wasn't in *Grier's Almanac* either—you can't beat me! And look here. I read where money is the root evil of all sin. Ain't you ever read that in the Bible? It's in there. If I had read that, I'd show it to you. I ain't a preacher, but I could of been one. But I believe a man that makes it honest and right—I don't believe the law ought to be so hard on them. Of course, that's takin' up for my own self, but I'll do that anyhow as long as I live. I believe if a man can make it right, the judge ought t'let him make what he wants to for himself. Then if he does, I'll make that judge a drink too!

"Now it's just as honest work as anyone's ever done. You get out here and make liquor and see if you don't sweat. As far as me tellin' you what it's like or anything, you'd have to find it out for yourself. And I'd have to learn you first. You don't know a bloomin' thing about it, but I do. My father learnt me way back yonder when I was young—back when I was a nine-year-old."

Simmie and his father cut out the pieces for and made their own stills from sheets of copper. His father made it the old mountain way in a thirty-five-gallon pot with no thump barrel, wood for fuel, and a copper

worm. Simmie continued the tradition after his father died. A typical recipe consisted of fifteen bushels of cornmeal, a bushel of homemade malt, and a half bushel of rye. He'd cook the meal (three pecks of cornmeal per stillful until the meal was used up), distributing the mash evenly in ten fifty-gallon wooden barrels, let it sit overnight, add a third more water the next day, and then cover the barrels and let it work off until it was ready to run. "When your beer gets ready to run, it's got a bitter whang. When it goes to gettin' a bitter whang, you better be a' makin' your liquor and that's the truth. Now the way I done it—I don't run backin's in my liquor. I take my liquor off when it breaks at the worm and run th'backin's. When I got a thump barrel, I'd have them backin's to put in it and not lose a drop of liquor nowhere."

He'd add an innovation here and there after it had proved itself, but he never moved beyond that basic style of production. The major innovation he accepted was the use of a "snail-shell" furnace in place of the more traditional bedrock style. He took us to see the furnace one afternoon [see Plate 3]. In this rare style, everything is the same as the bedrock furnace except that the flames, instead of wrapping around the pot from both sides and venting on the front, move around the pot through a spiral rock and clay flue and vent out the *back*. It uses half as much wood, and eliminates the discomfort of heat and flames venting into the operator's face.

"I was makin' liquor on government land so I wouldn't have to pay taxes on it, and the federal man who caught me said that [snail shell] was the prettiest still they'd ever seen. They oughtn't of tore it up, but the damn fools did."

Simmie never really tried to conceal his stills. "Tain't worth a Red. You've got to get to it yourself, and the damn law can get to it as good as you can. Thing to do is just keep everything quiet yourself. You don't have t'get out and strut your onions. Just leave your still out in the open 'cause if anybody's lookin' for it, they're going to find it anyhow. Keep your mouth shut. That's the best thing to do."

Of course, almost everyone knew Simmie was manufacturing. "Hell fire, I've had twenty-five cars right out here in my front yard of a Sunday, and all of 'em buyin', and church goin' on over there across the road. I shouldn't of done it, but I was pretty bold."

The law knew he was making it too (one sheriff frequently did business with him), and although he was caught many times, Simmie remains convinced that each time he was caught, it was because an informer reported him—and not because the law necessarily *wanted* to catch him. He retains an intense, and typical, hatred for "reporters." "Nobody with a still place is gonna' harm [report] nobody unless you harm him first. After you harm him first, you better watch out—you're a mule up a bush.

One time they was a feller over here—he didn't love liquor like I did, but let me tell you one thing right now, he loved liquor good. He'd even steal it from me. And I sold him land up there, and then he went and reported me. I don't like a reporter. I'd tell the world that; and he found it out the next evening. He found it out and it was pretty rough finding. I just told him he had twenty-four hours to leave. Never come back across that bridge. Never. He went! If he didn't, just as sure as that old gun in there would shoot, I'd a'killed him. Now fellers, you might not think I would, but I got some pretty good old shells. They shoot too. I said, 'If you don't leave here within twenty-four hours, I'll kill you just as sure as my gun will kill.' He left. And he had a good idea!

"But they'd report you. That's what they'd do. See they'd get *money* for it. Report you and then get money. Why, the officers knowed me just as good as anybody in the world. They knowed I'd plead guilty to it 'cause I knowed they knowed I was in there making it. I'd go down and plead guilty to the judge.

"One time I had a brand-new outfit. Starting to make brandy there. Thirty-six-gallon rig. Some of the prettiest copper—never had been set to th'fire! Brand new. I'd just started makin' it and got it just nearly ready t'put the cap on. And a feller lived right over there that used to come over here and buy liquor from me and try to pawn his shotgun from me for it. He never had money for his liquor, and so I got tired of it. I told him just to leave his old gun at home and t'come and get the liquor and pay me for it when he could. Well, he went in and reported it. Went down the walk way down here and called the law.

"I see'd him cross my pasture fence up here. I had a big pasture—and a wire fence around it. I see'd him cross my wire fence up there, and me and one of my other boys was out down there just ready to put the cap on it. And I see'd him cross the fence and I said, 'Claude, right there a'crossin' that fence is the law's tailin'. We been caught now!' I knowed he was a'runnin' with th'law, and goin' trying to catch people.

"I knowed I wadn't a'goin' with him. Anyway, there was pretty corn—nearly roastin' ears. Pretty corn. So I says, 'You go down through that corn patch and cross the creek and come out up there at Nelly's and Harvey's.' That's one of my boys. I says, 'The law will be here directly.' So I come on out and I picked up the cap. Some folks would [try to get the whole still] but I knowed it was full and I didn't have time. I knowed he'd be here.

"Well, he come on down here across th'fence to where the still was. So I come on over here to th'house and I had some liquor in there and I poured me out a pint of liquor and put it in my pocket, and I had a ol' double-barrel shotgun layin' right behind the door here. And so I reached

up there and got my gun with three or four shells, shut up the doors here, and went right up on th'hill so's I could watch'em. Sat there, laid there in the sun and drank my liquor, and directly they come up yelling, 'Hey ol'Simmie! Hello ol'Simmie!' and knockin' on th'door. They didn't know I heard ever' word they said, but I wouldn't come to them. I knowed they'd carry me to jail and I didn't want t'go. So I just waited and then that night I stayed home here. I stayed here in the back room. See there's three rooms back in on this side here.

"So way in th'night my dogs started barking. I always kept a bunch of ol'dogs here. I waited awhile, and then the deputy sheriff and his daughter come down here and they just knocked on th'door. I was just a'layin' in there, and they knocked and knocked. I heard him say, 'I don't believe he's here. I think he'd a'come out.'

"I think to myself, 'You crazy as hell. I ain't a' comin'.' And so after awhile they gave me up a'bein' here and got in th'car and went on back.

"And th'next mornin' that feller that reported me, why he come on over here. He come at five o'clock. [Annie was] in there gettin' breakfast, and I was in there in th'bed. I heard his car crank up over there and I knowed he was a'comin'. I said to her, I said, 'Well, I'm not goin'.' I went in there and took me two or three swallows of liquor and then come back in here. Set my gun in th'rack behind th'door.

"So he come and said what he come for, and he said, 'Well, I come over here and I'll tell you what I'll do.' He said, 'I'll carry you up to town and you won't have to walk and if you want me to I'll see that you can get a bond.'

"I said, 'You looky here.' I said, 'I'm not a'goin'.' I says, 'I'll die and go to hell a'fore I'll go with you.' And I said, 'That's as plain as I can speak. I'll die and go to hell a'fore I go one step with you!'

"He says, 'Hit'll make it harder on you if you don't.'

"And I says, 'I don't give a damn how hard it makes it. I'm not goin' and you can depend on that.' I said, 'You go back up there and you tell the sheriff to send a man down here after me.' I said, 'If you try to carry me, me or you one is a'gonna die!'

"And he knowed it, and he went on up there and told the sheriff just what I said. And they said you could a'heard th'sheriff laughin' fer two hundred yards. Laughin' at his ol'deputy who wouldn't try to carry me.

"So that mornin' after they left, why I just pulled me out a jar and got me a drink of liquor and put it in my pocket and pulled out and walked to Clayton. The ol' jail was there at that time. And ol'sheriff he seed me a'comin', and he knowed, an'he come to the door and he laughed till you could a'heard him a long ways off. So he says to his wife—she was back in th'kitchen I guess—and he said, 'Come here! Betcha' don't know who I

see a'comin'! I went on up there and talked to'im awhile. And I said to'im—him just a'laughin'; it was funny to him that that man didn't try to catch me—I says, 'It's a nice idea he *didn't*. As much liquor as I've sold him and dealt with him, and then him go and report me and think I would come to jail with *him*!' And th'sheriff said that'd tickled him to death.

"I said, 'What I want to do, Sheriff, is make bond, and then I want you to do me an accommodation.' I said, 'You do this, and then some time or another you'll never lose nothin' by it.' I says, 'You accommodate me, and some time or another I can do somethin' fer you. You ask me fer help, and any way I can do it, you let me know and I'll do it.' I says, 'You let me come in here now and plead guilty to this and then pay you the [fine] on it and let me pay it off afore it gets to th'grand jury room. Then that man ain't gonna have a thing to say.'

"He says, 'I'll do that thing.'

"I said, 'Now you're talkin' to suit me.'

"And so he went and he figured up what it would be. He said, 'It would cost you forty-seven dollars.'

"I says, 'Now that's all right.' And I pled guilty to it, and it cost me forty-seven dollars. No hereafter about it. Just pay the forty-seven dollars and that was all. And I paid it and come on back home.

"And that informer was a'waitin' thinking when court come that he'd get to bill me and he'd get to be a witness. But he didn't know nothing about it. So that's the way I got out. Didn't need a lawyer or nothin'.

"But whenever I was found out, I wouldn't deny it, for I knowed they knowed me and I just wouldn't tell them I wasn't guilty for I was. It's pretty hard to lie when you know one another. But they'd never catch me [physically]—slip up and say, 'Oh now, Simmie, I gotcha.' Hell, they didn't have me. I'd be across the hill! There wasn't no man on two feet could catch me. I never been caught and held but one time, and that was when I was fourteen years old. I got caught up yonder in North Carolina by my overall bosom. I used to sell that man liquor lots afore he got to be deputy sheriff. Catch dog I call it. And he run up and grabbed me and he said, 'Look, Simmie! I got you.' He weighed about two hundred pounds. I knowed he had me, but I was as stout as a mule then to my size. And I was mean enough that I didn't care. The ground was steep up in there. The mountains wasn't level like they are up in here. He was higher than I was and I jumped up and grabbed him by the shoulders. There was a rock cliff down where I was makin' liquor up there in Jackson County and I drug him off a rock cliff that was seventeen feet straight down. He didn't want to go, and, boys, he was hard to get down. When I got him down there I wouldn't turn him loose till I knowed he was gone. I pulled his shoulders s'fer back that I knowed he couldn't pull back. We both

went off together and I was just a little in front of him, and when I hit the ground, why I whirled over on my hands and feet and I jumped up and ran off and left him. They was seven of them, and I got into a creek a'runnin' and I knowed the creek and I knowed the banks and I knowed there wasn't no man that could outrun me. I didn't care who he was. I never was afraid of no man runnin' and catchin' me fer I knowed they couldn't do it. And I got down there in a bear road and boys I *made* it bare—right on out across that mountain right through the lower end of the gate. It's a rough place, but I run home and got away. And I left from there and come back to Georgia!

"But I got caught lots of times. I've went to the penitentiary. Well, I didn't go. That's a story. I didn't go. They *carried* me! I had four cases again' me and I had to go. I was already under six months' probation and they caught me four more times.

"So I got put in jail in Clayton and the sheriff—he liked me and all that—and he said, 'Well, Simmie, it's about ninety days before court. I'll tell you what I'm gonna' do. Since they brought you in again last night, I should send you off. But I ain't a'goin' to. I don't aim for you to go off. I'm goin' to turn you loose.' Says, 'I'll just ask you one question, Simmie. Will you be up here when court sets?'

"I says, 'You know damn well I'll be here when I say I will.'

"He says, 'Yeah. I'd trust you anywhere.' And he says, 'Well, you can go home this morning. I can't let you make bond, but I'll open the door and you can walk out.'

"And so I come on home and stayed till court. When court come, I [went up then and saw there was a rough judge in charge]. So I went to th'sheriff again and told him I was goin' to forfeit my bond 'cause I didn't aim to be tried in front a'that judge that was up there—I knowed we was gonna' have another judge later, and I *liked* the other judge. The other judge, me and him was huddies. He liked his liquor as good as I did mine. And I wanted to get him to be my judge. So I told the sheriff, 'Now I'm a'goin' to forfeit my bond this time, but after court I'll come in here and pay th'forfeit off and then make you a new bond.'

"He said, 'O.K. Simmie, that's all right.'

"I said, 'I thought I'd tell you I was gonna' forfeit so's you'd not look for me.'

"He said, 'I ain't gonna look for you nohow.'

"I said, 'Well, I thought I'd tell you so you wouldn't think you had to hunt for me. I'll come in and make a new bond.'

"Then when next court came, my judge was in there and I went in and pled guilty. They had four cases again' me. And I had twelve months' probation again' me, and I'd served six of it out, then got into trouble—

meanness, I reckon. Them six months that was again' me—you can't pay outa' that, and I knowed it 'cause I'd been in court enough till I was a pretty good lawyer. I knowed they couldn't do it. Well my judge, then, when I got to talkin' to him, he nol prossed two of th' cases. He said, 'You pick out two a' them cases, and I'll have them throwed out—nol prossed.' So I picked out two a' th' cases—the biggest ones—th' ones I thought'd be the worst—and let'im nol prosse them, y'know. Then I pled guilty to the other three. Then he give me two months apiece on each one of them three cases. Well, that made six more months, and I already had six months. Then he said, 'Well, I'm a'gonna take this six months now, and put it with that six months, an' Simmie, that's all you'll have—just six months. And I'm goin' to see that you don't stay that.'

"They carried me to th' penitentiary. I went down there and stayed two months and fifteen days and I was right back out here in th' yard.

"I didn't use a lawyer in court. I wouldn't have a lawyer in court. That's the worst thing a man ever had. If they ain't nothin' again'y', they'll send you t' the chain gang *anyhow*! I ain't never been in the chain gang, but I don't see how I missed it! I've always been lucky at that. When I got into trouble, I've always been just as lucky to get out as I was lucky to get in. I got in and I got out.

"But I served that sentence and three others in the Gainesville jail—81 Maple Street. I didn't stay *in* jail, I stayed *under* th' jail—had a room downstairs. Y'heard of people bein' put under th' jail? But I was just like one of the boys, and got to where I never did have to have nobody to stand for me, nor nothin'. I kept on comin' back. I had a heart attack while I was down there once. Lasted two days and nights—come in a damn a keelin' over. I didn't know nothin'. I was in ward number two—I didn't have to work. I was sentenced not to work. Th' judge told'em to fix it so I wouldn't have to work a lick at nothin', 'cause he liked me, and I liked him. But I did help cut off tater roots one day there—ol' jumbos, I believe they call'em. Why they was bigger'n any y'ever see. They'd grow from anywhere to three, four, five hundred bushel of 'em. And they had a great big canner over there—just cut th' roots off and throw 'em in there, and boil'em and peel'em, and they'd come out canned! We canned three-hundred-and-eighty gallon cans. They'd come out red hot and you got t' wear gloves. Just catch'em—just toss them to another feller that'd be a' standin' there. I done that all day one day, and the next mornin' I went over there to hop up on the counter. The boss, he was long-legged and I was going get acquainted with him. So I hopped up by the side of him and I said to him, I said, 'Look a' here boss. Your breath sure smells good to me this morning!'

"He said, 'What are you in for?'

"I up and told 'im what I was for.

"He said, 'You set right here and if anybody comes here and asks you to do anything, you tell 'em that I said for them to go to hell. You got you a buddy now!'

"So I set there and he said, 'I gotta go over there and straighten out a bunch. I'll be back directly.' Them fellers that passed me going to work would holler, 'Come on here, Free, and let's go to work!'

"I'd say, 'Go to hell! I ain't gonna work no more!' I never did strike another lick at work. Him and me got outta there and walked—seemed like a quarter of a mile. Went to a place—great big room—and it was chock full of pints and quart bottles of government liquor. See, they got a big distiller there on that farm and they made the liquor there. He went in there and he'd done took up with me by then, and he took a drink out of a bottle. I was a'wantin' to drink. So I said, 'Look a'here, boss! I ain't had a drop of liquor in two weeks. Longest I ever done without in my life.'

"And he said, 'Well, it's right here. You help yourself.' He said, 'I don't care if you drink *all* that.' He said, 'Me and you can't drink it all, but you're welcome t'drink ever'drop you can.' He said, 'I can't allow you to take one drop back only what you can carry with you.' He said, 'Fill your stomach plumb full and at's all I can let you carry.'

"I told him, 'All right, then.'

"He said, 'You be over here ever' mornin' between eight and nine o'clock.' And sure enough I was over there ever' mornin'. And we'd pull back and go to the place. After we'd stayed there a week, he wanted to give me a key so I could go in there and get it any time I wanted it. I said, 'No sirree. I ain't! What if I was to go in there and get a drink of that liquor and someone was to come and overpower me and take a whole bunch?' I said, 'I won't do it, I didn't come down here to get into trouble. I come down here t'go home when my time is out.'

"He said, 'How long are you down here?'

"I said, 'Six months, but I won't be here but two months.' But I was. I was two months and fifteen days. But I got out easy and quick, I thought. I'll be damned if they wasn't plumb good to me. Know what they taught me how to do in there? Play horseshoes! I already knowed how to fight. I've always been quick to get mad and quick [to get] over it. I don't care if I get a whippin'. When I lived up here in the orchard, I come in many of a night with my eyes swelled closed. What did I care for it? Go right back and try it over. I'm one that wouldn't give up. I've been a tough little customer. Everybody'll tell you that!"

HUNTER

"I used t'turkey hunt a lot. Used t'coon hunt lots. And a way *back* yonder—that's since me and her was married—I used t'possum hunt lots. Had dogs that was just the awfulest things t'tree possums you nearly ever see'd. Well, back then, I *ate* possum. I thought they was as good a meat as I ever ate in my life. But later on I just got kindly weaned away from'em. I ain't eat no possum now in, I guess, twelve, fourteen, maybe fifteen years. But we'd just skin'em. She's the one knows how. She knows how to *do* it! I'd skin the possum, dress'im up good? Then she'd take and boil'im good and tender? Wash'im off in clear, cold water and cook'im up till he got plumb tender? Then take'im out, put'im in a pan and put'im in the stove and bake'im good and brown. That was good eatin', now I'm a'tellin'y'. And she knows how. I guess she's cooked more wild meat than any ten women that's ever been in Rabun County 'cause I used to keep it here all the time. I was young and stout and able to do anything. I could hunt all night long and it wouldn't hurt me. I *enjoyed* it, you know. And I always wanted t'hunt by myself. I've always wanted to be out by myself just a huntin'.

"[Before we moved here] we lived down in Habersham County, and I wanted to come to Rabun County to go a huntin'. I didn't have but three

PLATE 4 Wig, Ray McBride, and Simmie
in his cornfield.



dogs then. Just coon dogs, you know. Well, I come on over in here this side a Black's Mountain in the Pollyanne Gap twixt Black's Creek and the Oakley Church. She'd always have me something cooked to put in my hunting sack t'carry with me to eat while I was out, and I'd always carry stuff for my dogs too. This one time I was gonna lay down there and wait till daylight 'cause I was going over in a pretty rough place (which I didn't care for the rough woods nör nothing); but I wanted to do that 'cause I'd coon hunted enough till I knowed when it was time t'get them! You get them after daylight—tree 'em after daylight. Well, I come on over there. I lay down and went t'sleep—laid with my head on one of the dogs all night. Used it for a pillow, and it was a good'un too! And I knowed I was just as safe as I woulda' been at home about anything a'bothering me 'cause I had a *good* stock a'dogs—blue tick and redbone mix, and black and tan, and they was mean too—I mean they was mean enough for anything. Kill a snake or anything that came around. They'd kill it.

"Well, I laid there and waited then till I see'd daylight was comin'. I got up and eat me two or three bites—she'd always send me some coffee along for my breakfast—and I got my breakfast ready and I sit there and eat. And then I always had my little bottle with me—it had a little more in it then it's got now [looking at his pint of moonshine, laughing]. It's about empty now, but I'll put some more in it in a minute! I'd always carry it with me, you know, and drink what I wanted to and put it back in my pocket and go on.

"So I had two dogs never had been trained for coon hunting, but I knowed they had the stock in 'em ready to train. I wanted t'get 'em trained and I knowed how to do it—just take the dogs and go on and go. I got down in right in above old man Joe Brooks' place. He was a preacher—lived down right beside Oakley Church. And so I was in way above his house way up in there, and I knowed them coons was in there. So I carried my dogs and went on down in there, and I looked down in a little old branch and there was the tracks just coming and going like everything. And I knowed they was in there before, but when I see'd that, that *pleased* me! I went t'yellin' and callin' my dogs, and just as quick as they could get to me, they come to me and I said, 'Hyear! Hyear! Get in there!' Hollered to 'em, you know; and they just fell off into the branch there and went t'runnin' and barkin' like they'd *always* run coon. They follered that branch gulley I guess a mile around there and treed up a white pine. It must'a been nearly two foot and a half through. And you know the limb's on 'em's so thickety you can't hardly see through 'em, but th'sun was a shinin' good by then. Well, I went plumb around the place, and it was in just above a great big high rock cliff where the pine tree was.

"Well, I went around there—go on that side and then come around on the other side—and I was fixin' t'leave. I tried to. Couldn't see nothing. I called little Buck—he was a small dog—but he wouldn't *quit*. I called him and called him and he wouldn't come to me. He was sittin' there with his feet up on that pine tree and barkin' up there, and I knowed then it was up there. I says, 'Well, I'll be doggoned.'

"Well, I didn't have nothing with me but an old dull ax, so I kinda started to come on home but I couldn't get him to quit. He was a'barkin' and a'barkin' and a'barkin'. I turned around and I went back up there and I said, 'Well, I'll look that tree over one more time.' And right down about the second or third limb there lay as big and pretty a coon as you ever see'd in your life. He'd got out on a limb and had his head turned back toward the body of the tree. Well, there I was. I didn't have no gun ner nothin'. And I didn't have no way a'gettin' him but that old dull ax. 'Well,' I says, 'I'll cut th' thing down.'

"I pitched in there, and honestly, I guess it took me two hours and a half, or maybe three. But I cut it down and it come right down over the top of this rock cliff where this old man had six barrels right in under there and the whole outfit where he was a'makin' his liquor up in under the rock cliff. And that tree went right down over the top of it and it turned a somerset and throwed the body part of the tree a *way* back down the mountain, and boy that old coon *left* there! The old man was at the house, but if he'd a'been in there it would'a scared him to death!

"My dogs never had knowed how to get in there and run, but I got a way where I could go around the rock cliff and I come down there, called'em, put'em after it, and they run then. I guess they run it a mile and a half—just went around and around that little old mountain there, and it tryin' t'keep ahead of'em, you know. And they'd never learned t'run like they ought to, but they was a'learnin' it *then*! I'd holler to'em ever' time I could, and that was pretty often; and so they kept on and it run I know nearly an hour till they treed it up a great big ol' forest poplar, and it on government land. And I says, 'Uh oh! No cuttin' this down here.' Back then they wouldn't let'cha'. Well, they won't do it *now*—let you cut down a tree. I wouldn't a'been able t'cut it down nohow. But I see'd that old coon a way up there on a limb, and I said, 'Well, *now* what'll I do?'

"So I pulled out and went down there to old man Aaron Wooten's house. I knowed him well. I went to him, said, 'Mr. Wooten? My dogs got a coon treed up there and I'd like t'get a gun and some shells and kill it. I'd like t'get'im.'

"'Yeah,' and he says, 'Simmie, I'd like t'go wi'y' too!' He says, 'I'm a'goin' back up'ere wi'y'.'

"I says, 'Come on!'

"We pulled out and went back up there, and that little dog that I couldn't call away before? He was still sittin' there, but the other two had come to hunt me. That one's daddy was a wirebeard, and th'best tree dog you could keep. Mean little dog. And so we got up there and I says, 'Well, Mr. Wooten. If you don't care, let me have the gun and shells. I'll shoot it.'

He said, 'Yeah, for that gun knocks me down nearly ever' time I shoot it.'

"I said, 'I don't care for a gun kickin'—not a bit.' And I got around and got t'where I could see it. I didn't want t'kill it. I wanted t'just cripple it and see m'dogs fight it. I liked t'see my dogs fight a coon. And the coon was bigger than my dogs.

"And so he had his leg a'hangin' over th'limb, you know. I told him, I says, 'Mr. Wooten, I'm gonna' shoot him in this left hind leg. I'm gonna' shoot him now and maybe he'll jump out.' I said, 'If he ever jumps out, these dogs'll catch him.'

"I shot him, and the old coon set there—he got up—he didn't care whether he come out or not. He set there. And where th'shot went in his leg and it was bleeding, he'd sit there and try t'keep licking that blood off'n his leg. He'd look down, and there was the dogs just a'takin' on. They knowed that he'd be down directly. We just kept waitin', and Mr. Wooten says, 'Simmie,' says, 'you're gonna' have t'shoot him again!'

"I said, 'Let's give him about two or three minutes,' I said, 'and he'll get mad and come down from there directly.'

"And sure enough, it wasn't but a minute. He just kept licking that blood, and that shot was a'hurtin' him too I know. So I said, 'Here! He's gonna' come down!'

"And Mr. Wooten got down pretty tolerable close to the poplar tree, and that coon, he turned and he come down head *foremost*—come down with his head down holdin' with his hind feet, y'know. And boy them dogs of mine, when they see'd him come down in sight, that's just all they wanted. And th'yellin'—you never heard the like. They wadn't no need t'tell them t'hush. They wouldn't. And that coon just jumped right on top of that little dog of mine, and boy from that they doubled up over and over. 'Course the other two was right with them then. And it wadn't but a minute till they had that coon dead.

"And from then on, that little dog made the best coon dog I've ever see'd in my life; and I've had some as good a dogs as any man ever could own. And *that's* what learned him, was getting him out and letting him know what he needed to do.

"And so I come on back home, and there was a family of people that

lived near there that had registered coon dogs—great big old dogs. Mine looked like little feisties. Wadn't nothing t'th size of their dogs, y'know. And so the old man and two boys said, 'We want to go a'coon huntin', and we want you to go with us.'

"I said, 'Well, I'll go with you uns *tonight* if you want to.' And that was after goin' out the night before! But I'd done got that big one, and they knowed my dog ud *tree* one. Well, they got their dogs then and I carried mine right on back in there. We got in above this man's house, and I said, 'Well, now, we'll just have t'listen, for my dogs is gonna' go back where them coons is.'

"When we got there, it was done twixt daylight and sunup and we was all just walking a old road. I said, 'Listen. I hear "Buck."'

"And by that time, why they heared him then, and their dog barked. I forget what they called him, but he was a *great* big pretty dog—pretty a dog as you ever see'd nearly. But th'sun was way up then, maybe a half-hour high. We got over in there and my dogs [had] stopped at a big poplar stump. Buck was there barking, and the old man says, 'My dog's gone to a different tree. Which one of the trees do you want to cut down first?' He says, 'I *know* there's one there where my dog's barkin'.'

"I said, 'Well, my dog's young. I wouldn't *say* there's one in here, but I'm not goin' home till we cut down this poplar stump.'

"He said, 'Well, let's go down and get mine first.' There was a poplar tree with a hole in it. We went down and cut it down. I didn't do none of the cutting. The boys was younger and bigger'n I was, and then I was tired already from up in the night before. I let them cut it down, and it fell and hit the ground, and out of there went the biggest old gray squirrel you ever see'd, and right around the mountain it went.

"My dog run, but he turned *right* away from where the squirrel was and went back to where he had treed up that poplar stump. 'Well,' the man says, 'Simmie,' says, 'your dog must be right. I've never see'd a dog do like that in my life.'

"I says, 'Well, this is the second one he's ever treed, but,' I says, 'there's a coon up that stump.'

"We cut it down, and when we cut it down, two coons just barely grown run out. We shot one, killed it. I says, 'Wait a minute. Let's don't shoot *that* one. I want t'see the dogs fight it.' I says, 'I'll climb the tree.' So I climb the tree up there and got me a stick and made him jump out, and the dogs, they killed it.

"But his dog was just mistaken. It wasn't a thing but a squirrel den. And that old man says, 'Well, I never have see'd the beat in my life. What do you reckon's the reason my dog did that?'

"I says, 'I don't know.'

"Well,' he says, 'what made your'n *wouldn't* stay there at that tree but come back to the poplar stump?"

"I said, 'He knowed what a *coon* was.'

"So we got both of them. I give them one and took one. Boy, now, we had a *good* time on that trip!

"There was a year or two that she'd go with me when we carried the mules and wagon. Me and her would go and camp out and like that, you know. We went one time right over here on Seed Lake, and I had a little old dog along with me. Now this was going *fishing*, and we *caught* fish. We went over there in above the Bedingfield place and we camped out. They all knowed me and her, and we was just welcome anywhere we wanted to camp out. I had my mules and wagon and everything. Stayed the night.

"So the next morning, I carried my little old dog out there and he got after a coon there; run about, I guess, three hundred yards when he treed. And I went up to him. Somebody'd cut a great big hole in a poplar tree there—it was holler—and he was little but he couldn't get up to that hole and he was wantin' in there. Well, I got up there to him and picked him up and pushed him over in there! After I got him in there, I was sorry I put him in 'cause it was an old coon and a bunch a'young'uns. And that dog wasn't as big as the coon, but he wouldn't holler. He was gritty. So one of the young coons run out of that tree and I caught him. Caught him alive. I brought him back to the wagon after I got my dog out of there. Then I had me a pet. He was pretty. I brought it home and raised that thing. It'd just come to me and run up my arm and run around my neck and from one shoulder to the other. Made a awful pretty pet. And a feller come down the road from close to where I was, a'livin'. He was carryin' off a load a' hogs t'sell, and he had the *prettiest* old big'un there. I *wanted* that pig 'cause it was pretty. And he wanted to buy that coon. I said, 'I don't want t'sell the coon. He'll *miss* me.'

"Well,' he says, 'I've got some boys. They'll take care of him.'

"I said, 'Well, if you want to . . . ' Said, 'If you'll let me have that pig in there that I like so good, I'll swap you that coon for that pig.'

"Sure enough, I did and he traded with me. I come on and made a great big hog out of that pig.

"I don't know *what* he ever done with the coon.

"Now I never shot a deer in my life. I went bear hunting, though, one time up there in North Carolina. Went way *back* yonder a hundred and fifty miles or more. We went up to an old bear waller place—me and Lawrence Nixon—and I carried a dog from here that I thought had all the

nerve a dog *needed*. We got up there—you know it's laurel thickets and everything—and my dog came running back t'me with her bristles up and so scared she wanted to get behind me. By God, I was about half scared. Lawrence said she smelled a bear.

"So we went on walking along, and directly it went like a *mule* a'runnin' away. He says, 'My dog's got one a'goin' now!' And the dog wadn't a'barkin', but he'd scared a bear out of its bed.

"Me and Lawrence went up there, and they was two logs a'layin' together and one right across them? And right in between them logs is where that bear had been a'layin'. That was its bed. And so his dog went right on out across the ridge after that bear, and my dog come and stayed right *behind* me. I didn't care because I'll tell you that bear was makin' such a racket it sounded *dangerous*. Now it finally got away, and that's the only time I ever did go hunt for one.

"I'll tell y', they're a dangerous lookin' thing! I was over there right above Ellijay Post Office one time coon hunting, and I had a high-powered shootin' rifle. It'd really shoot now! And so I was walkin' along by myself pickin' out a place to coon hunt—goin' up a little ridge—and I was slippin' along. Wadn't makin' no racket. And all at once I heered somethin' make a little racket. Didn't know what it was. I just stopped and was standin' there and lookin'. I had my eyes open, and I had *two* good eyes then! I wouldn't want to be in that country with the only eye I got now. And I looked, and there set a bear. He was settin' right up on the stump of a lind tree that somethin' had broke off. And me by myself way over there two mile from home. And I looked at that bear *knowing* I could kill it 'cause I knowed I had somethin' with me to do it with. And I stood and watched that bear—great *big* old son of a gun—wonderin' would I kill him dead. 'But now,' I said, 'it's a way over here, and I ain't able to get none of it home, and I'll just not shoot him.'

"Directly he come around—barely turned his head that way and sniffed like he was sniffin', you know. I couldn't keep from laughing at him doing that way [he sniffs twice], knowing that he couldn't get to me 'cause I had something that would kill him and I was quick enough with it too. And I seen directly he winded me, you know, and he come down that lind tree stump from where he was sittin', and I'll swear his claws went down into that straight up stump over a inch deep as he slid down. He just went walkin' on. I stood there and laughed at him a'walkin' on.

"I love bear meat, though. Best wild meat they is. I like that stuff. But I don't want one *after* me!

"And I used to hog hunt a lot. Used to keep a big bunch a'big hounds. I mean red bones and blue ticks—somethin' t'hunt *with*. So I used to be an awful feller to wild hog hunt. Just get right out in the woods and hunt by

myself—me and my dogs. I'd always have seven or eight great big old dogs, and all I'd have to do was get back in there about where I thought the hogs was a'rangin' and holler and call my dogs to me like I'd see'd some. Stand there, and when I got'em all, say, 'Hyah, hyah now!' and holler, 'Sooeey!' two or three times, and holler about them to go get it, you know, and they'd start going. Sometimes when I heered'em, they'd be a mile from me, but they'd have one bayed, and I'd go to'em then. I always carried my gun, and if it was one I wanted to kill, I'd just kill it. It was on government land. Anybody could kill'em that wanted to. And I liked t'kill'em and *eat* 'em too! When I got one, I'd quit and come in home where I had a mule. I'd get him and go back and get my hog and bring it in. Skin my hog in the woods. Wouldn't scald it'r'nothin'. Just skin it, and then bring it in and eat it! I've had a lot of them too.

"But one time they was one on Rob Lovell Mountain. There's several different old house places over there where people used to live, and they'd all moved off and left all their old hogs in the woods. So the woods was pretty full of wild hogs, and they just didn't care who went and got'em. Th'government wanted'em moved out anyway. They didn't care if you killed'em, and nobody else didn't care, so I got my part of 'em. I could do that and I didn't have to buy no meat. I could have all the meat I wanted, and it was *good* meat, for back in them days the woods was plumb full of acorns and hickory nuts and mast, you know, that would fatten a hog. And I mean t'tell you you could get some good eatin' out of'em. It was *wild* hog, but I like wild meat anyhow.

"Anyhow, they'd been a hog in that country I know was anyhow twenty year old—older'n that 'cause he was a big'un. He'd sharpen his tushes—rub'em up on a pine sapling—way up there about three and a half foot high. He was a *big* un. I know he was a big'un anyhow 'cause I killed him!

"But I had eight hounds then, and they'd fight anything. Mean. Well, Jeff Burton was livin' there, and he'd come up there and told me, said, 'Simmie, we scared up that old big hog awhile ago.'

"I said, 'Y' did?'

"He said, 'Yeah. I ain't jokin' you.' Says, 'Did, and it's as big as a cow!'

"I said, 'That sounds pretty good.' I said, 'You'ns want t'go with me and we'll go get him?'

"He said, 'Hell, yeah we do.'

"He had two dogs up there, and I had maybe a half a dozen. So we went on down there and he showed me where he scared him up at. I took them dogs and put'em to the bed. Called'em, said, 'Hyear! Hyear! Sooeey!' Showed'em the way it went and they left.

"I said, 'Jeff, we got t'get to the top of that mountain so we can hear my dogs.' And I'm a'tellin' you right now, they run that hog two hours and

fifteen minutes. Better than any fox race ever was in this *world*. Wasn't no breakdown in it. You never heard such a like. So I had my gun and Jeff had his'n. 'Course we didn't run together. We was just tryin' to keep in hearing of the dogs. If he'd a'bayed, that hog would'a killed ary dog I had before we knowed it.

"But those dogs was a'runnin' him, and I was a'runnin' t'foller. I was gettin' to where I thought he was gonna' cross the creek. I knowed where a ford was, and I was a'makin' for it. I got right up in there and I heard my dogs come in over top of a mountain—all six r' eight of them in a bunch, you know—and here that hog was a'comin' right here. It looked as big as a cow to me! But I had my old gun and I just pulled the hammer back just as it hit the edge of the water and I shot it, and he stood right up on his two hind feet, and I *know* he was seven and a half foot high a'standin' in that creek. Then he just fell over 'cause I put th'shot right where I wanted it! That's 'cause I was scared of that hog. He'd a'got me if I hadn't a'shot him. You know, a hog'll cut you with them tushes like a knife!

"And I killed'im, and I jumped in there and cut his neck vein so he'd bleed in the creek. Left him a'layin' there.

"So just as I was coming back out a'th'creek, here come Jeff just as hard as he could run. He hollered from way up the hill, and I answered him, and so here he come, and me with the hog a'layin' there. He'd done quit kickin'. I'd done had his neck vein cut so he'd bleed good, y'know. And here Jeff come runnin' right up there and pulled his gun hammer back and he shot a dead hog right there!

"Well, then my son Grover had a A-model car, you know. We all got in the car and come back—we could drive the car pretty close to where the hog was. We snaked the hog to where we could get him and put him in the A-model. He was a great big'un. And I forget how long them tushes was where they come out of his head, you know, but I know they was the longest hog tushes I ever see'd in my life. And I forget how long he was from the end of his nose to the root of his tail, but I know his tail was twelve or fourteen inches long. Awfullest hog tail you ever see'd.

"So we come on and brought him home; and back up at the orchard up yonder, we had plenty of wash pots, tubs and ever'thing. We scalded him and cleaned him and we divided him up—give him t'anybody wanted him. I sold Lynn Blakely up here a ham and a shoulder of him because I had plenty and I decided I'd just let him have it. Boys, he went and gimme I think it was nine cents a pound for the ham. Now go buy you one and see if you can get him for nine cents a pound! So that was the biggest hog that had ever been killed in Rabun County.

"I brought a wild hog in here live one time and kept it for a brood sow to raise pigs from. Put her right over there in my hog lot.

[We asked Simmie how he brought it in.] "Drove her! Had her by the leg. Ain't you never driv a hog [laughing]? Well, you don't know how then. If you didn't know, you'd get eat up. It'd turn on you, and boy! You wouldn't be there no longer. It'd bite you. Wild hog'd eat you up!

"What you have to do is have you a stick and keep him going yon way, and if he starts back at you, be able to knock him down. You *better* be able 'cause if you don't they'll *bite* you! You have to have it tied with a rope right above the hoof here on the right hand hind leg here. There's no danger of it gettin' off. [We asked him how he got the *rope* on.] Didn't I have dogs that'd hold him? Good God yeah! There's a way a'doin' *anything*. I've had dogs right here since I've lived here.

"Anyway, I brought her here and raised I don't know how many bunches of pigs from her. I kept her for a stock hog eight or ten years."

VETERINARIAN

"I was a bad hand to go all over the country and do anything in the veterinary line for cattle, hogs, anything. I've got the name of bein' the best they was in Rabun County. Once a feller lived right over here and he had four hogs to be castrated, and Herman Hunter had two t'be castrated. Well, I was ready for one of mine to be castrated too, so when Herman asked me what I charged, I said I never charged a man a penny in my life, but I guarantee the hog'll live when I get through with him. But I says, 'I won't charge you nothing, but I'm gonna have one some of these days, and I want a little help to do that one.'

"They both spoke up and says, 'Simmie, we're ready any time you are.'

"So I said, 'Well, come over tomorrow and we'll fix it.'

"So this hog of mine was a registered big-bone Guinea. Weighed about 480 pounds. You know what's the truth? The meat from them makes the best gravy of any hog ever was 'cause the gravy's sweet and good all the way through. I'd fatten them and kill them and cure them out. You know how to do that? Kill your hog, let the heat go out from the meat and lay it down on a table and take your sugar cure and just rub it all over both sides of it. Then hang it up. I hung mine up over yonder in the crib—no sack or nothing. Just hang it up and nothing else'll ever happen to it. It stays good all the way through—makes some awful good breakfast eatin'. Used t'have a big old barn to do that in. Used t'have cattle and everything. Now I ain't got nothing.

"Anyway, I had this big hog to be castrated over in the lot. He'd come up to me. I could rub him. He'd foller me anywhere I wanted'im to. See, I'd kep'im ever since he was seven or eight weeks old, and he liked me and I did him. And he was a *big* old hog.

"And he had a long tail on him, and Fred says, 'I can hold that hog.'

"I said, 'Fred, now listen: I've handled more hogs'n ever you've see'd, and I says, 'some of as mean a hogs as ever you've see'd, and I'll tell you right now you can't hold that hog.'

"He says, 'I will.'

"I said, 'I'll bet you ten dollars you can't do it. By God, I'll pay you the money if you can.'

"Well, he come in and he wrapped that big old tail around his hand and he was gonna' hold him anyhow? And I'll tell y' what the devil done. He held that hog till he pulled th'hogs tail in two! And th'hog went runnin' down the hill, you know, and I couldn't do nothin' I wanted to then.

"Next day, here come a feller—me and him used to hunt lots together—Harrison Crump come up here and said, 'Well, I heard you and Fred couldn't do anything with your hog.'

"I says, 'No, we didn't.'

"He says, 'I can help you if we can catch'im.' Says, 'I'll show you how easy it is done.'

"I said, 'Well, a man never gets too old t'learn. I'm ready t'learn.'

"And he come and he says, 'Well, how you gonna' catch him?'

"I says, 'Well, I've got a dog. All I have to do is tell him to get him. When he gets him, he'll have him.' He was a great big old half blue tick and red-bone. And I told him, I says, 'Get him, Spot!'

"And he just made a dive and got the hog by the ear. The dog come right back here again' th'hog's side, you know, and th'hog tried t'swing loose, but he couldn't.

"I said, 'Well, there he is, Harrison. What am I gonna' do now?'

"He said, 'Have you got a barrel?'

"I said, 'Yes sirree. Good sixty-gallon barrel.'

"He said, 'Well, get it.' Said, 'How long will that dog hold'im?'

"I says, 'The dog'll hold him till I tell him t'turn loose.' And he didn't believe it, but anyway I went up there and rolled down the barrel—brought it right by the side of him—and then me and Harrison got the hog and got his head sort'a started in there? And then I made m'dog turn his ear loose so we could push'im in that barrel.

"Now it don't look reasonable, but this is the truth. We got that hog in there and turned that barrel up, and Lord, the hog was way up higher'n the barrel. I had to reach way up there to get to'im. But he was in there, and it worked just that way. I castrated him a'sittin' right there. Then we put the barrel over and the hog got right up and I throwed him some corn and he went t'eatin'. But once he was in that barrel he had no chance t'sling his head or do nothing, and it didn't take me a half a minute then 'cause I was used to that. I was all over Rabun County in the veterinary

line of business. They'd come far and near for me. I never charged a thing for it in my life. Never did. Didn't believe in it. My father always did people like that. He wouldn't charge. And I never did. Never took a penny of no man's money in my life for that kind of work, and I got a name of being as good a one as has ever been in that line of business.

"One morning Joe Lovell's cow was tryin' t'have a calf and was in a bad shape. Well, they sent and got two veterinarians to come, and they'd stayed up nearly all night with the cow. Didn't do no good.

"Next morning, me and Jeff started to town—we was walkin' down there towards town—and Joe come out there. Says, 'Mr. Free, I've not had a chance t'see you nor ask you, but,' he says, 'that's what I should'a done. Come and asked you first.' He says, 'I've had two veterinarians here nearly all night, and m'cow looks like it's gonna' die anyhow.'

"I said, 'Let me look at her.' Me and Jeff walked out there and looked at her. They'd worked and worked and didn't know *what* to do. And the cow was a'layin' there just fixin' t'die. Would'a died. They'd even took th'calf's legs off up here at its knees and *then* didn't know what to do and all of them veterinarians. If they'd had any sense, they'd a'knowed t'push it *back*. The calf's head was just doubled up—never could'a got out. Well, it didn't take me long. I told'em I wanted a gallon a'warm water and a whole lot of soap and a pan. I pulled off my coat, and rolled up my sleeves. I said, 'Here, that'll be *easy* done. We'll have that done before you know it.'

"Went t'work and we worked there about—I guess it took me about forty minutes t'do what I done. It's what should'a been done the night before. It's all in *knowing how*. Had t'push it back in and straighten th'calf's head so it could come on out. Then after I got that done, I had to clean her out and everything. That was to do. If you want one t'live, y'have t'be decent with'em. Be nice to'em, you know. And so we got her up then. Had to help her up she was so weak.

"But then I said, 'Joe, y'got any fodder?'

"He said, 'Yeah.'

"'Good,' I said. 'Get the prettiest fodder you've got and bring it here to this cow. And if you've got any cornmeal, get her a little cornmeal.'

"He run and got the fodder and I fed it to her. She was up then, standin' up just eatin' like ever'thing. But I knowed about that on account of watching my father so many times. You know, you can learn by seein' other people do. And I saved that cow. He's told me many and many a time since then that that was the best deal he ever had happen to him.

"And she came right on and made a good cow—aw, she already *was* a good cow, awful good cow. But they had her bought and never had paid for her. And this man had three or four children. *Anything* you can do to help a man out when he's raisin' his family—help'em out, I mean, in milk

or bread or anything like that—I know it's good for anybody 'cause I've had to live like that myself. I've *lived* on milk and bread. Me and her, when she was able to take care of 'em and milk 'em, we'd never be without two or three cows. But back when I was raisin' my family—back in old Hoover's times—people was hard [pressed]. Ten cents an hour and *then* no work. I had to make liquor or do something or starve to death. I told 'em I'd do anything before I'd starve. And, dern, I'd starve before I'd *steal*. I never *have* had to do that. But I've see'd the time when it begin to look pretty dangerous! I've sent my boys to school with one shoe of one kind and one of another. But it didn't hurt 'em a bloomin' bit. Naw, it didn't hurt 'em. It let 'em learn a little hard times.

"But about that veterinary business, you've sort'a got t'know the nature of a cow to find out what disease she's got. They's a lot a'people don't understand how to take care of a milk cow or anything. If you know *how*, you know *how*, and if you don't know how, nobody can't tell you. You've got to kind'a learn. Self-experience is a mighty good teacher. My father learnt me how to do things.

"Like sometimes a cow gets what they call hollow tail. Now a cow ain't supposed to get hollow tail. Most of the time, if she has hollow tail she's had too much hollow belly! Now I'm gonna' show you how to cure it. You may think I'm a'tellin' you a lie, but it ain't. It's the truth. Take a cow's tail that already got a hollow place? Pull it up and take both fingers and rhash that way? They won't be a bone in there. Maybe it'll be three or four inches before they'll be a bone in there. Well, you know what I do? *I* do. I say it's the present cure. You feel back up there where the bone stops at. Take your knife and just cut that tail smack off and throw it away. That's the present cure of a hollow tail. But *then* feed your cow, or next time you can't lay it on the hollow tail. The hollow belly'll kill her. She'd starve to death!

"Now if your cow had such a pretty tail that you don't want to cut it off, I'll tell you what you can do. You can split her tail just as far as it's hollow and put stuff in there and tie it up for two or three days and then come back and if it's still hollow, you better cut it off! You can always use a little turpentine in there, but be sure you don't fill that hollow place *full* of turpentine 'cause if you do, it's liable to go to the cow's brain and kill her dead as a nail. But a little'll take the soreness out.

"I'll tell y' they's a whole lotta things that people don't understand. None of you'uns don't have no warts do y'? [Ray McBride shows him a wart on one of his fingers.] Is that a wart? Yeah. It feels like it. That the only one? You've gotta tell me the truth now. If you've got another'n, tell me the truth. If you don't, you won't get it done. [There is only one wart]. Do you want it to stay there, or do you want it gone? You haven't got no

business with it, have you? Well, you won't have it long. I'll give you a nickel and you won't ever know when it gets gone. You needn't think about it no more.

"Now it used to be if your nose was bleedin'—about to bleed to death—I could stop it just like that [snaps his fingers]. But that's something I'm not allowed to tell you. If I did, then I might not be no more good from then on. They's just a whole lotta things I understand. They's a whole lotta things I *know*. It's th'truth.

"One time I had a dog get bit in the eye by a rattlesnake, and his eye turned white as cotton. I got me a half pound of lard and a half teaspoon of alum and give it to that dog and he never died. They'll eat that lard. They know it'll do'em good. And that alum—you needn't to worry about'em once they've got that in there. It'll be two or three days before the swelling goes down, but the dog'll be alright.

"Now I believe that'd be good for people. You know, alum's not poison. You could eat a half teaspoon full a' alum and it wouldn't hurt y'! It'll sure cure a dog. It'll keep a dog from dyin'.

"I'm afraid of snakes now. One bit me. Copperhead. Tushes over a inch apart! I was about half drunk when he bit me. That's the way I generally stay when I got anything to drink. And he just snabbed me. It was in a old log barn I bought when I first come here. And so when he bit me, the son of a gun run. It pleased me t'see him go! I *wanted* t'get him out of the way. I come on over here. They wasn't no porch here then. They *had* been a big porch there but a storm blowed off half of it. So I come back and set down on th'doorstep and I heered a car comin'. I was sellin' liquor at the time. Bootleggin'. And they come here t'*buy* it too! And I was sort of glad of it 'cause them comin' all the time is what caused me t'have what I've got now. If I hadn't a'bootlegged, I couldn't a'made it. And I'd sell it t'anybody that come. I didn't care who it was.

"So while I was sittin' there, I told my wife t'get me a pan a' coal oil—kerosene oil, but I call it coal oil—like we heat with. She did. And I was sittin' there squeezin' them two places there where th'tushes went in. You could see a little clear bubble come to th'top of that oil. I just rubbed it, and took me a drink along. I heered a car comin' up th'hill there. It come up th'hill and I had my hand down in the pan there, and my son-in-law come up and said, 'Lord have mercy, Simmie. What in th'world's th'matter?'

"I said, 'Nothin'. Damn snake bit me a while ago.'

"And he said, 'You want'a go t'th'doctor?'

"I said, 'I'm not in no hurry. Yeah,' I said, 'I want'a go, but I ain't in no hurry.'

"'Well,' he says, 'we're not in no hurry.' He says, 'Get ready and we'll go.'

"I said, 'Well, don't rush.' And I had a little half-pint bottle in my pocket—it was nearly full—and I handed it to 'em. I said, 'You'uns can drink this. I'm goin' t'get one t'carry with me.' I come in and poured me out a pint and stuck it down in my pocket. Pulled out and went up there to th'doctor's.

"I said, 'Look here, Doc.' I said, 'I'm goin' t'tell you now before you do *anything* to me.' I says, 'I was pretty drunk when the snake bit me, and,' I says, 'I had plenty a'liquor and I've been drinkin' liquor ever since, and,' I said, 'look here. I've got a full pint just to drink. Don't you give me no shot nor no kind of medicine that'll gee-haw m'liquor.'

"'Why,' he says; 'Simmie, I ain't gonna give you nothin' to hurt you.'

"I said, 'You *better* not!'

"My hand swelled up, but never did hurt me a bloomin' bit. Stiff—I couldn't use it for I don't know how long. Swellin', you know. But if it hadn't a'been for that liquor, it would'a done me in.

"But that doctor laughed. Said, 'Simmie,' says, 'you needn't t'worry about yourself.' Said, 'All you've got t'worry about'll be the snake 'cause th'snake'll *die*. Said, 'You're so much poisoner than that snake was that that snake'll die!'

"I said, 'I don't care if he does.' And that's all they ever was to it. Got right over it. But I'll tell you now, you let a stick or anything move around where I can sort'a see it and I'm scared now. I used t'never be afraid of a snake, but you get bit and then you *will* get afraid.

"I was glad to see that one that bit me go. He went down to that damn waterhouse and I burnt the whole thing up. Boy, I got mad. Come to find out a big white oak log over there on the left side of the house had always been the holler, and that's where the snake den was. Way we found out was me and a girl we raised was washin' one day. We used to have to build battlin' benches—take the battlin' paddles and beat hell out of the clothes to get them clean—old-fashioned washin'. Me and her were down there at the washin' place where the reservoir is now, and we was down there battlin' one day; and I said to Diane, I said, 'Diane, come over here and help me turn this log over.' She was stout—strong—and young. I was stout too then—stout enough to move a log as far as that went. But she stuck her hand down here and we turned that log over and there lay an old copperhead right there that close to where she put her hand in there. A big'un too. And someone went and got my double-barreled shotgun and brought my shells. Well, I just took my time. I knowed what to do. I could see then—I had two good eyes then. I usually just put their heads off 'cause that's where the poison is, and I knowed how to get rid of th'poison. So I shot it in two. Now I'm gonna tell you—these people might say it's a lie, but it's the truth—there was six little ones fourteen inches long crawled out of its mouth.

And them little son-of-a-guns would strike at anything they saw. They came right out here where she was supposed to have her mouth. She had swallowed them. They just came crawling out. They was fourteen inches long. Six of 'em. You gonna give me th'dog, huh? You think I got the world beat don't you? You don't believe that's true? Well, I wasn't lying. It's the truth.

"And this last summer, right behind where the chair's sittin' right now? Annie was sittin' over there in the chair you're in, and I was sittin' over here lookin' through the winder. We have to keep this door here shut on account of the wind. Comes from the northwest. And she says, 'I see a snake.' [It was inside the house along the living room wall.]

"I says, 'What kind is it?'

"She says, 'It's a copperhead. It's spotted.'

"I said, 'Don't you *move*.'

"So I went in there and got my gun; came back and set down over in this chair. And I couldn't get to find its head nowhere. But I see'd that I could cut it in two twice with that shotgun. And I thinks to myself, 'If I can make *three* snakes out of one, the head part won't get far!' I shot it. Shot that wire that runs to th'heater here plumb in two, and shot a hole plumb down through the floor, but I killed that snake! Don't like them much at all."

"I've been through a lot, but . . ."

"They ain't nobody ever been through as much as I have. And of all the trouble I've ever had in my life, I've never asked none of my folks t'help me one penny. I've never asked none of them for one brownie. They have to work to make a livin'. I'll get mine, and I ain't gonna steal it neither.

"I've always lived on my own—since I was sixteen years old. Now I'm a'settin' here and I'm a'livin' at *home*. Got plenty to eat, and plenty to wear if I don't get out and get it wet!

"We had nine children. Two of 'em died. It's lucky to have seven a'livin'! Back in old Hoover's time when we was a'raisin' 'em, it's a damn wonder ever' one of 'em hadn't a'perished to death. But I always set my head to have enough to do with, and I never listened to nobody.

"My daddy—that's his picture right up there—never owned a foot of land in his life, and I always said I was going to. By God I did, and I got it, and I know who it belongs to. Ours. Nobody can come in here and tell me I gotta' move. Look at the money I've put out here, and I made it the best way I could. And I ain't stole none of it. And there ain't no damn

PLATE 5



man in this world can say that I ever took nothing that didn't belong to me. If a man accuses me of that, I'll shoot him sure as that gun in there will shoot. And it'll shoot! It ain't got a bit of sense. It'll shoot anybody I tell it to! No, I wouldn't be accused of stealing. It makes me so damn mad to have something around and have somebody come and steal it. If they need anything I've got, I wish they'd come and ask me for it. Then if I see fit, I'd let 'em have it, and if I didn't see fit to, I'd just say, 'I ain't got no use for you.' That's what I'd say.

"No, never had to steal. I made it on liquor and damn good management. I've never listened to nobody since I was fifteen year old. Not even my wife. I've been a long-headed somebody. I don't listen to what nobody tells me. Well, I *did* one time. When I stayed out a'school t'go a'huntin', the teacher asked me why didn't I come to school? I listened to her. Then I told her I'd rather hunt. I got graduated from the second grade and didn't go no further. And I've hunted all my life ever since. Now I've got no dogs. I've got eight, but they ain't no *dogs*. I want t'show them to you

directly. I've got five of the prettiest pups out there that's ever been. They're beagles.

"And now here we are at home. Got our own home and don't owe a penny. I've seen the time when it begin to look pretty dangerous. But you might know some of my boys. Lewis is a carpenter here in Clayton, and Grover runs the Quick-Stop down here in Tiger. He don't run it—he owns it! And then Harvey, he's a second-handed car man out in Clayton. That's my third boy. And my fourth boy's in Florida. They're all off now and a'makin' their own way and a'makin' a good livin' and I'm pleased of em.

"No sir, I've been lucky. Been *plumb* lucky. T'be a'livin'. I've not done nothing t'hurt nobody. 'Course I wouldn't let nobody drag me around. That's one thing I've never done.

"I got a good home here. All paid for and don't owe a penny on it. Enough a'timber over yonder to make *fifty* houses bigger'n this one. All my children's married off. Ain't nobody but me and her here, but we have a big time. She can't get around and go much. She won't even go a'fishin' with me. She never *would* fish . . .

"But I've been a worker. I've worked as hard, I guess, as any little devil that ever lived. But I've enjoyed it. I've always lived and had a good time. Going to as long as I can. And I'm gonna' live just as long as I can see anybody else a'livin'. Now they needn't say nothin' about that!"

HIDE TANNING

I enjoyed working on this chapter because the people we interviewed were all so friendly—like Minyard Conner who gave us two coon skins and R. M. Dickerson who told us this story:

"Men used t'have stories they'd tell about dogs—about what their dogs would do in th'way of hunting one thing'r'nother. And Oscar Powell was a'talkin' one day t'get ahead of Lawton Brooks and his stories. And that possum dog—coon dog, especially—there's two of th'kinds that could always be just nearly perfect. And Oscar said he had a dog one time that you could just blow your horn and he'd come up. He'd know you was going a'huntin', when he heard th'horn blow. Said he'd come up, and you could take your board [to stretch the hide on] and just hold it out there and let him look at it, and said he'd go off into th'woods and he'd catch you a possum that'd just fit that board.

"But said he lost th'dog one day, and he didn't know *what in the world* come of his dog. He never had done that before, and he always come back home; but he said this time he hadn't come back and he didn't quite understand.

"And he heard his wife a'talkin' in there tellin' about so'n'so that had come over t'their house, t'borry an ironin' board. And said she went and got th'ironin' board and brought it out there, and they'uz standin' at th'door talkin'—she had th'ironing board up on her hip just standin' there talkin' t'th'lady—and said she looked out in th' yard there and that dog'uz actin' kindly funny. Said he'd look around, and look around. Then finally after awhile she said he just went off up thataway. Said she didn't think anything about it. But he never did come back.

"And Oscar said, 'You know, only way I ever figgered out—that dog

never could find a possum 'uz big enough t'fit that ironin' board and he's still a huntin'."

From working on this chapter I've learned how to tan at least seven different kinds of hides in at least nine different ways, and I feel that I can do it all on my own. It's been a fun way to learn.

RANDY STARNES

Interviews and photographs were done by Ken Kistner, Curtis Malan, Mike Pignato, Joe Sabin, Kevin Speigle, and Randy Starnes.

EQUIPMENT

The equipment needed for removing hair or tanning was far from complicated. Almost any watertight container made of wood or cement or cast iron will do as long as it is big enough to hold the hide(s). Will Zoellner advised, "Don't use a steel drum, or tin. Something in the metal ruins the hide." Julius Speed used a cement vat large enough to hold simultaneously fifteen cow hides spread out flat. Others used boxes made of white oak boards. One man even buried his hides in the ash hopper and removed the hair from them at the same time he was dripping lye for soap.

By far the most popular container, however, seemed to be the "tan trough"—an eight- to ten-foot-long section of yellow poplar trunk two to three feet in diameter and split in half. One half is hollowed out (like a dug-out canoe) with a broadax and foot adze, with four holes bored underneath at the two ends for legs, and a drainage hole bored in the bottom and sealed with a plug. The hairing or tanning mixture is mixed in the trough and the hide(s) submerged until they are done. The trough is rocked or agitated frequently to make sure the solution gets into every fold of the hide.

One also needed some sort of knife or scraper for scraping the flesh and fat off the flesh side of the hide prior to and after hairing and tanning. Harry Brown, Sr., filled this need easily: "I made me a little fleshing hammer. I just turned me over a buggy spring and took a file and filed me some little notches in it. You don't want it too deep, but you got t'go in that skin. There's a little thin layer between th'hide and th'skin, and if you don't get that off, you can't work it up."

For scraping or currying and smoothing the hide when it came out of the vats, some used a rough brush like a curry comb. Julius Speed made a log stand for currying and working. He put two three-foot legs in one end and let the other rest on the ground. Standing behind the raised end, he'd drape the hide over the log and curry it smooth.

Beyond this, all one would need would be the ingredients such as ashes, bark, mutton tallow, or neat's-foot oil, and so on, as will be explained later.

REMOVING THE HAIR

The first step employed by almost every contact we had in converting the animal skin to something useful was the removal of the hair. Most of them did this by first scraping the green hide free of flesh, and then soaking the hide in a mixture of hardwood ashes and water (about one shovelful to the

PLATE 6 Jake Waldroop





PLATE 7 A fresh coon hide has been soaking in a paste of hardwood ashes and water in this bucket for nearly a week. Now Jake fishes around in the bucket to find it.



PLATE 8 He finds it, raises it out, and checks to see whether or not the hair has started to loosen yet.

gallon) until the hair pulled free. The thicker and larger the hide, the longer—and the more ashes and water—it took. The process could last anywhere from two days to nearly two weeks. When the hair began to turn loose, the hide would be taken out, scraped clean, washed, worked as it dried out to keep it pliable, and then cut up into shoe laces or whatever else it was to be used for.

R. R. Singleton said, "We always had a log with a trough cut in it. Put your hide with hardwood ashes—hickory and oak mostly—and water in there, and leave it until the hair comes off. [Richard Norton recommended putting a thick layer of ashes on the hair side of a larger hide and rolling it up before putting it in the water-filled trough.] Then take all th' hair off of it and then take runnin' water at th' branch and wash all of that lye out of it. Then you take it and put it over a barrel'r'log and work it till it's soft."

Dan Manous used ashes, but rather than submerging the hide in the pasty ash mixture, he did it as follows:

“Back when I was a boy, I used to trap animals and catch ‘em, skin ‘em. Then I’d spread my skin out on a board. You could tack it down if you wanted to, but you didn’t have to as long as you kept it spread out good. Then I’d take ashes just out of th’fireplace, y’know, where they burned somethin’ like oak or hickory like you’d burn through th’winter season—good strong ashes like they used to use in these ash hoppers.

“Put th’hide hair side down, and put a good thick layer of those ashes on th’flesh side. Apply ashes all over it—not leave any of it naked, y’know. Then sprinkle it over with water until you get th’ashes good and wet, but be careful not t’wash any of th’ashes off. Let it stay there three or four days and nights, and when you go back, take ahold of some hair stickin’ out and pull. You can tell when it’s a’gonna’ come.

“When th’hair’s ready t’come off, you just turn it over, tack some little nails around th’edges of it—spread it out so you can get ahold of it—and scrape it with a knife or somethin’. All that hair will just come off.

“Then put it down in a bucket of lye soap. They made it in a liquid form back then. Just grease and lye. Later on they got t’makin’ it where you could cut it into cakes, but they made it back then in liquid form. Put it in a bucket of lye soap and let it stay there about thrée or four days. Then you take it out and wash all that soap and ashes off of it—get it clean. And

PLATE 9 When he finds it has, he drops the hide into a bucket of rinse water to remove the ashes and some of the hair.



PLATE 10 He then pulls most of the rest of the hair off by hand.





PLATE 11 Once the hair is off, Jake dries the hide with a burlap sack.



PLATE 12 Now, using the edge of a metal bar, he works the hide, scraping it back and forth across the top of the bar to make sure all the hair is off, and to make sure it is smooth and clean.

PLATE 13 Then he wrings it out to remove any remaining water, takes it to the house to wash it well with soap and water [traditionally he would have used lye soap], and leaves it in the sun to dry, working it occasionally to keep it pliable.



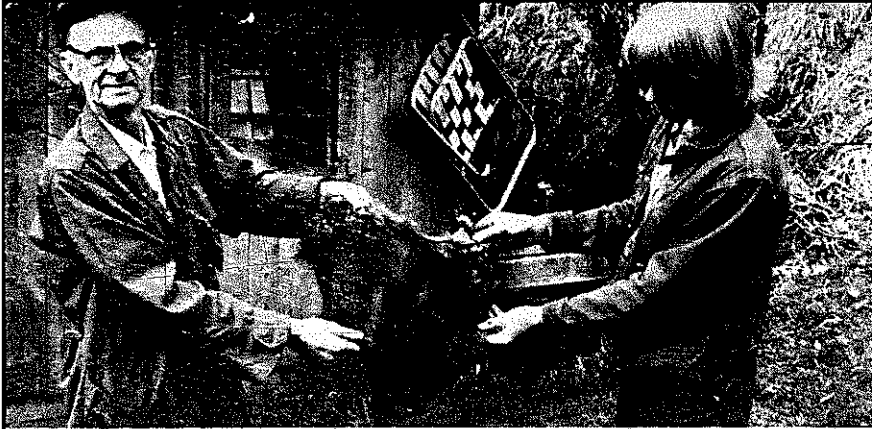


PLATE 14 Tedra Harmon (left), who makes banjos, uses groundhog hides for their heads [see banjo-making chapter]. He showed *Foxfire's* Ray McBride how he prepares the groundhog skin for use. Here, he and Ray hold up the skin of a groundhog he has just killed.

PLATE 15 Tedra uses an automobile oil pan, lined with a plastic trash bag split open. He places the hide in, hair side up, covers it with ashes, and then waters it down, folds the flaps of the trash bag over it to keep it moist, and sets it in a nearby shed out of the heat of the sun. After the first day, he checks it every morning and afternoon to see whether or not the hair is beginning to pull free.



PLATE 16 When the hair will pull off the skin easily, he and Ray push the wet ashes aside and begin the long job of picking the hair loose. In this case, because of the warm weather, the hair began to come loose after two days of soaking.



PLATE 17 They work together until as much of the hair as they can pull off has been removed.



PLATE 18 When the hair is mostly removed, Tedra lifts the hide out . . .



PLATE 19 . . . and takes it to the nearby creek to wash it off well.

just keep workin' it then, and beatin' it over a stump or log or somethin', and workin' it with your hands till it gets dry."

Jess Rickman remembers that you could shortcut the whole ash process by simply taking the lye that came out of the ash hopper and wetting the hide down with that. That method, as he remembered, would take the hair off in about three hours, as would unslaked lime in water, according to Will Zoellner. Will's only warning was not to leave the hide in any longer than necessary (8-10 hours) or the hide would be damaged.

There were other ways of removing the hair too. Dan Manous told us, "With a wildcat, you can crack th'head, y'know—break th'skull—and take th'brains out of th'head and rub it all over that flesh side—just take your hands and rub it all over th'flesh side—and that will take th'hair off. It don't take long. If you can get it to a fire where you can just kinda' hold it up to th'fire where you can just warm it up—not too hot—just warm it up a little, that'll take effect and th'hair'll just drop off. It'll work fast—faster than them ashes.

PLATE 20 He then takes it to the back porch and, with a piece of scrap wood, scrapes away any remaining hairs from that center section of the hide that will be used for the banjo head. Then he puts it in a bucket of strong soapy water to soak overnight. This arrests the action of any lye that may remain and would continue to eat away the hide.



PLATE 21 The next morning, he removes a dried deer hide from the shed door. This hide will also be converted into heads for his banjos.





PLATE 22 In its place is tacked the soaking-wet groundhog hide. It will be left there until completely dry and stiff, and then stored for use. Just before use, he will cut out the head, soak it in water to make it pliable again, and tack it onto the banjo while still moist. As it dries, it will tighten on the instrument.

PLATE 23 He sizes up the deer hide and estimates that he will be able to get three good heads out of it—a good use for a hide that most hunters would simply toss away.



PLATE 24 Tedra also sometimes tacks groundhog hides on boards to dry. He tacks them so that they don't touch the board to allow air to get underneath them as well.



"Now I don't know if a groundhog brains'll do that, but I know a cat's will. Yeah. I've tried it. I've done that."

Builder's lime was another possibility. Harry Brown, Sr., said, "Use about a quart of lime to a gallon of water. [You can approximate because] if you don't get as much, it might take about a half a day or a day longer. If you get a little more, it'll get th'hair slippin' about a half day or a day earlier. You just keep checkin' it. Then take it out, clean and scrape it, and stretch it out as tight as you can and let it get almost dry. Then you finish workin' it dry. That's when y'get into work!"

Another contact told us he used to use soda, smearing it over the flesh side of the tacked down hide. No water is needed as the grease and fat in the hide will keep it moist. Leave it eight or nine days, and when the fat turns loose, the hide is ready to use.

TANNING WITH BARK

The majority of our contacts removed the hair from the hide first, using one of the methods described earlier, and then, if desired, tanned it by the following means:

In the spring of the year when the sap was up, they would strip bark off chestnut oaks (or "buck" oaks as R. M. Dickerson called them), and haul it to the place where the hides were to be tanned. Will Zoellner emphasized that a good time to gather the bark was on the new moon that comes about May 30. He said if you waited until summer to gather it, it wouldn't work nearly as well.

Then, using the bark either dried or green (we found people who did both), they hacked it into tiny pieces (and beat it with a hammer if they wanted to speed the process), placed it in the trough or vat, and added water to make an ooze. To this ooze, the hide was added and allowed to soak until tanned into leather.

For some of our contacts, the collection of tan bark for tanning hides became their living. Mr. Dickerson described how it affected his family:

"When I come down here in nineteen and nine, I'uz sixteen years old. And we'd been here two years when my father died. We had some land up in th'Blue Ridge Mountains there, and my two older brothers'ud go up there and cut down trees and skin th'tan bark and haul it down here and sell it. Take it down t'th'railroad station and load it on a car. Or they'uz people over here at Dillard'ud buy tan bark. Millard Grist bought a lot a'tan bark, and then he went into th'acid wood business. He'd buy tan bark and crossties and telephone poles.

"And they'd get up enough tan bark t'fill up a [railroad] car, and they'd ship it over t'Canton, North Carolina r'somewhere over in there, and then they'd beat that up.

"The way they done that, they'd cut'em a ring around th'tree about four feet long, and they'd just get around and cut that ring off—just take a ax and chop a little "v" all-th'way around th'log [at the base], and then they'd come back and split th'top off—just take th'ax and go along th'top—and just get that bark loose between th'two rings they made around there. And then they'd put th'ax in there, or a spud (most all of'em had a spud but we couldn't afford t'buy one because they cost a right smart, and all th'money we could get we needed t'take care of our kids at home. There was three boys and two girls left a'home, and all of'em just little fellers. I'uz th'biggest one and I'uz just sixteen and they'uz on down. So we didn't have enough money t'buy a spud). So they'd just put a ax in there, and if th'sap was pretty good they'd start up here and push th'ax down—one of'em 'ud hold th'bark and pull it over, and th'other'n 'ud push it down—get a great big slab a'bark off. And then they'd lay it up.

"Had t'cut th'tree down on th'ground [to get the bark]. They'd do that in th'summer time. Then they'd go back in th'fall of th'year, and if it'uz somethin' that'ud make a saw log, why they'd cut a saw log off a'th'body if it'uz a good body. If it didn't, why they'd work it up into firewood at home. And use it. So when th'sap was up and it'ud skin good, they'd have t'do th'skinnin' then. But 'long in th'fall they'd go back and work that tree up into wood'r'lumber'r'somethin'. Wouldn't waste anything.

"And that tan bark'ud come off kindly round. Look sorta like a trough. Well, they'd take and lay it down and flatten it out, y'see. Maybe lay somethin' on top of it and weight it down. And by doin' it thataway, you could get a whole lot more loaded in a wagon than if it'uz rounded up. So they'd mash it down flat that way. Get'em a stack up, then lay'em maybe a big rock on there and let it lay there till it dried out. Then they'd go back and get'em a sled and put it on a sled and haul it down t'where they could get t'th'wagon. And they done that with steers."

For the actual tanning process, we found that each of our contacts, though using basically the same method, had his own tricks and variations. First we've let Julius Speed, who used to tan cow hides for his neighbors for a living, describe his method completely. Then we'll add variations at the end of the chapter.

Here's how Mr. Speed described it:

"You go through th'woods and y'skin th'bark off a chestnut oak. Then y'haul that in.

"Then you get your hide. I went and got hides. They [the people who wanted the hides tanned] generally always had th'cow skinned. Somebody'd say, 'I have a hide I want'cha t'tan' and so when we got ready t'go t'tannin', I'd go and get it. [According to Mr. Speed, as soon as the cow or calf died, the neighbors would usually skin it right away, take the green hide, salt it down good on the flesh side and roll it up until it took the salt well. Then they'd hang it up on the side of the barn and let it dry out so that by the time he got it, it was usually dry.]

"You take them hides—they're generally dry—and then you soak'em about two or three days in the creek. And then take'em out, and then you put 'em in a vat and spread'em out and cover them with ashes is what we used to do—put ashes over'em on the hair side. And then you take'em out, and y'take a curry knife and y'take the hair off of'em. And then you take'em, whenever y'get'em haired, back to the creek and soak'em for about a week.

"And then you take'em out of the creek, bring'em back to the vat and spread'em out, and you hack up that bark that you skinned. You cut it up right fine. I set up many a day and hacked it up until I'd get enough to cover the [first] hide. Then I put in another hide, and do th'same thing until I got the remainder put in.

"Then about two weeks later, I taked it out and I'd put it on this horse and curry the flesh side of it—where all th'flesh was. Curry all that off. And hack up *new* bark and put it back just like I did th'first. And I'd leave it in there then, I guess, for a month.

"Then I'd take it out and I'd curry it again on that flesh side, and if it'uz colored good—I could tell, y'know, if it'uz colored all th'way through good or not. It'd look sorta like that [pointing to light brownish boots]. [If it was not tanned completely, it went back into the vat.]

"It'll get hard when y'take it out. You have to put it down and roll it up and work it till it becomes limber after y'take it out of th'vat. It don't take very long. I always just put it down on th'floor and just rolled it back'ends and for'erds."

According to Richard Norton, you could change the color of the hide depending on what kind of bark you used to tan it with. He said that after the hair had been taken off the hide with ashes, the men would beat either chestnut oak bark (if they wanted the hide to come out brown) or white oak bark (if they wanted it to have a yellowish cast). The bark, according to Richard, could be used either green or dried—it made no difference—and the ooze would be strong enough to tan with when it was a dark, coffee color. Rather than using a large vat, like Julius Speed, Richard's family used a small tanning trough and tanned only for family use. They

would wash the ashes out of the trough when the hair had been taken off the hide, place some bark in the bottom, and then lap one hide in, accordion-fashion, with bark between each layer. Then water was added, and when the ooze was strong enough to begin tanning, they would watch it closely, agitating the mixture once in a while to make sure the ooze got into every portion of the skin. Then, periodically, they would change the bark to make sure the mixture stayed strong to the end. When the hide was tanned, they would take it out and work it. As it dried, they would rub oil into it so that it would stay pliant.

As Mr. Dickerson remembered the process, they would go ahead and tan the hide in bark ooze without taking the hair off first. They would skin the bark off while the sap was up, and then beat it into fine pieces with a hammer: "You heard the expression about the Devil beatin' tan bark? These old mountain people used t'take, fer instance, some sorta' unusual sound, somethin' out a'th'ordinary, or some expression that was sorta' bewilderin' that you didn't quite understand? They'd compare that as to th'Devil a'beatin' tan bark." When the ooze was made, and the hide submerged, they'd test every few days to see if the hair was coming off yet. When it began to come loose, they'd take the hide out, take a rough brush, curry all the hair off, and then use the hide as it was for shoe leather, etc. He admitted that it was hard for him to remember exactly how it had been done, because he was young when his father was doing that work. "You'd get in th'way of them old people, and they would tell you to get out of th'way, and if you didn't get out of th'way, directly you'd be standin' up t'eat for about a week."

Will Zoellner agreed that you could tan the hide in bark with the hair on. He said that if you did it that way, though, you had to either burn the hair off with a blowtorch when the hide came out of the ooze and was dried, or pass the cut shoestrings through a fire to get it off. (Or you could just leave the hair on and use the hide that way.)

Most of our contacts disagreed as to exactly how long the process took. R. R. Singleton remembered that it took about two weeks to tan a small hide like a groundhog, but that a larger one took considerably longer. Will Zoellner said that you could speed up the whole process by boiling the beat-up bark and water until the mixture turned the color of indigo. After it cooled, you added the hides, and for cow and mule hides it would take twelve months for a thorough job. For smaller hides like wildcats and foxes, it would take only ninety days. Harry Brown, Sr., remembered most of the tanning being done in the fall, cow hides being left in the bark solution for the entire winter.

All agreed, however, that no matter how long it took, it was hard work.

When easier methods came along, according to Mr. Brown, "They quit this tan bark business because it's a lot of trouble to get out there and skin tan bark, beat it up; it takes so much longer."

OTHER WAYS TO TAN

The use of chestnut bark was not the only way of turning hides into leather. Other contacts remembered using a variety of different methods.

WITH BRAINS

Minyard Conner said that rubbing the flesh side of a freshly killed squirrel or groundhog or wildcat with its own brains, and then holding it up to a fire to warm it, would not only make the hair turn loose but would also tan the hide at the same time. He had done it often himself.

Will Zoellner also used brains, but somewhat differently. Once, when he killed a wildcat, he skinned it immediately and then rubbed its brains on the flesh side of the hide while the brains were still hot. He then folded the hide in half flesh side to flesh side, carried it home, and then took the hair off with ashes and water. When the hide was off, he dried the already tanned hide, rubbed it with Vaseline, and used it for a banjo head.

WITH ALUM

Julius Speed used to tan coon hides for shoe strings with alum. He took the hair off the green hide with ashes and water, washed it thoroughly, and then laid the hide out flesh side up and covered it with alum. The hide would be tanned and ready to use in about a week. Richard Norton described using the same method for wildcat hides.

Harry Brown, Sr., sometimes tanned using alum and salt. He used about four ounces of alum and two ounces of salt per gallon of water. He then let the hide soak in that solution three or four days. That turned it white and tanned it.

Will Zoellner also used alum, but claimed it could only work on thin hides that were easily dried—especially groundhogs. He claimed to have used an alum and water mixture successfully too.

A strong tea made with alum and oak bark would also work, according to Dan Manous, but he couldn't remember the proportions of the recipe.

WITH LARD AND FLOUR

Mary Green remembers that one of the best methods was to rub the in-

side of the haired hide with lard and coat that with a thick layer of flour. The hide would then be rolled up with the lard and flour to the inside and set away until the blood was drawn out and it "looked like it was done." Then it would be worked and oiled to keep it soft.

TANNING WITH THE HAIR ON

Julius Speed often tanned sheep skins by taking the green hide, scraping all the flesh and fat off, and salting down the flesh side. When the moisture from the hide had absorbed the salt, he shook off any excess and then covered the flesh side with alum. When the hide was thoroughly dried (about a week or so), it was ready for use.

R. R. Singleton used almost the same method for fox, deer and sheep skins, except that he used a mixture of half alum and half soda, and didn't bother salting the flesh side first. He simply rubbed the mixed powders into the scraped flesh side and let it dry for about a week. The mixture would work on either a green hide or one that had been dried for a week or so. He thought it was better, however, to do it while the hide was green. When the hide was dried, he would just dust any remaining powder off. It didn't have to be washed.

Harry Brown, Sr., rather than using either of the above, always used one bar of P&G laundry soap and six ounces of arsenic or lead. He'd chop up the bar into a small kettle, mix it with a little water to dissolve it into a mushy paste, and add the arsenic or lead. When it was pasty, he'd rub that on the flesh side and let it dry. It would preserve the hair side intact, but

PLATE 25 A bear hide being dried in the loft of a barn. The hair side is down, and the flesh side has been coated with a thick layer of alum.

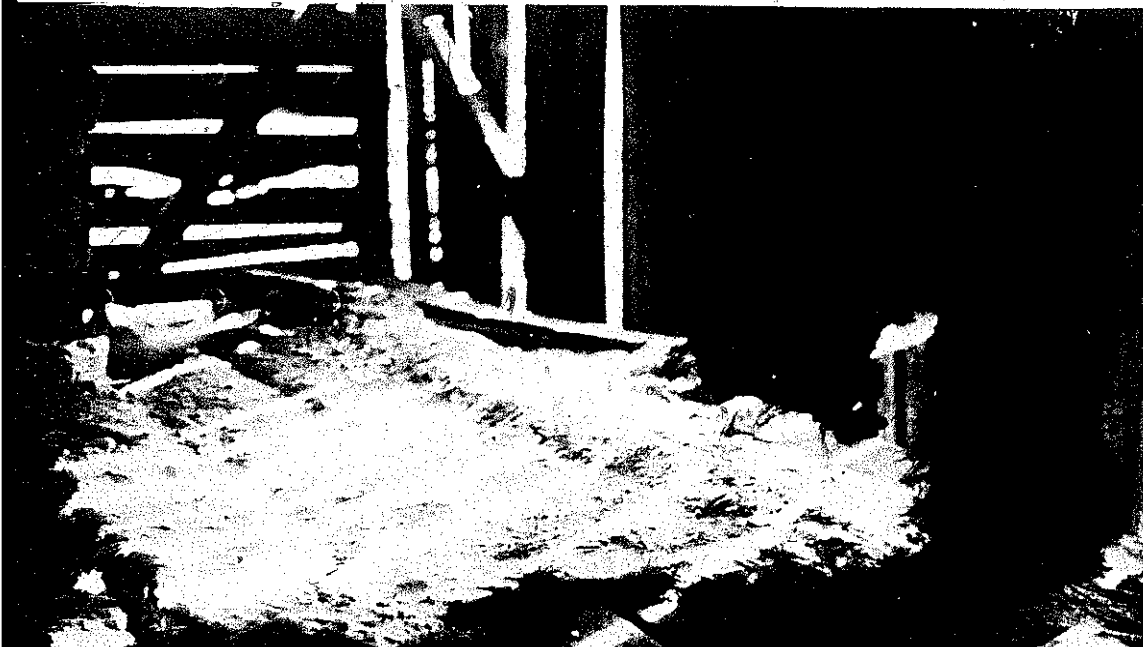




PLATE 26 Hides were often removed from the animal whole, turned inside out, and stretched over boards to dry for shipment to fur companies. Here Lon Reid and *Foxfire's* Robbie Letson hold a fox and a raccoon, skinned and dried in that fashion.

would turn the flesh side black. He used to mount deer heads for trophies in this manner.

Many people in the area used to simply dry hides with the hair on for sale to fur companies. They would use a long, thin board about two and a half feet long, six to eight inches wide, and tapered at one end (rather like an ironing board). The size would depend on the size of the hide being stretched. Then they'd skin the animal from the rear so that the hide was



PLATE 27 An old photo of Lawton Brooks with hides drying on boards.



PLATE 28 Minyard Conner dried hides on boards for use in making shoelaces or rawhide to repair harnesses. Here, he and *Foxfire's* Ken Kistner slip the board out of a dried coon hide.

PLATE 29 Then, as Curtis Malan holds the board, he slits the hide up the middle . . .





• PLATE 30 . . . opens it up . . .

PLATE 31 . . . and cuts a strip off the edge for use as a bootlace.





PLATE 32 After the lace is sliced off, he drives a nail in a post and draws it rapidly back and forth against the nail to remove the hair. For longer strips, he cuts in a circle and joins two strips together as described in this chapter.

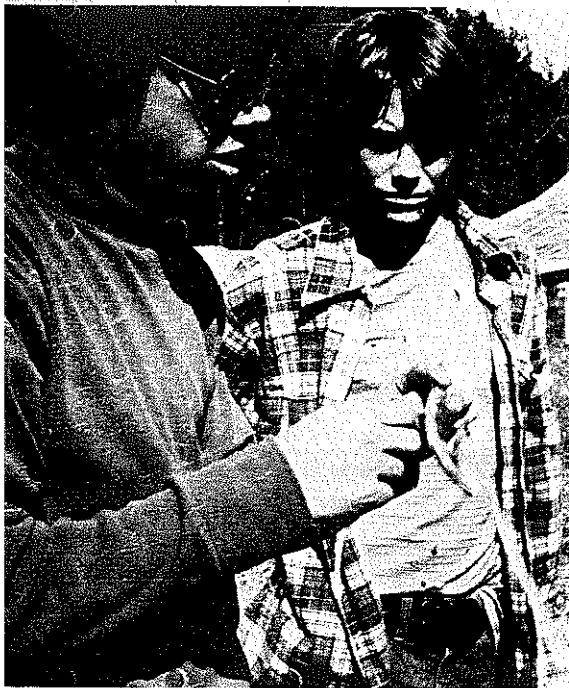


PLATE 33 Ken and Curtis examine the strip of hide.

peeled off all in one piece, but inside out. This inside-out hide was pulled over the board so that the flesh side was exposed to air all the way around. The section of hide covering the head fitted snugly into the tapered end of the board.

The hide could also be skinned off flat (split the hide down the inside of the back legs to the crotch, and down the inside of the front legs to the breast bone, and then from the underside of the chin down the chest and stomach to the crotch and peel it off). Sharpened sticks would be set into

the pouches of both the back and front feet thus stretching them apart and thereby stretching the hide out flat.

The hides were then simply hung up in a barn loft and allowed to dry prior to being shipped off to fur companies.

KEEPING THE HIDE PLIABLE

As hides dried after being haired or tanned and washed, they were kneaded and rolled to keep them pliable and soft. Many contacts told us of sitting around their fires in the evenings after supper working hides.

People had various methods to make sure they *stayed* that way. Will Zoellner rubbed neat's-foot oil into the hides to force water out and let the oil take its place. He claimed this would keep the hides good for twenty years or more.

Harry Brown, Sr., melted either mutton or beef tallow, mixed it with equal parts of melted beeswax, and rubbed this into the hides. The mixture could also be rubbed into shoe leather to keep water out of boots and shoes, and keep them soft for at least two months.

USES FOR HIDES

Some hides were sold. As Richard Norton said, "They used to buy hides in here of all kinds. Fellers came around buying skins of any kind that would make furs, y'know, like coons, polecats, possums and everything like that. They used them for coat collars, and that was another way for us to make some money back then."

R. M. Dickerson, the mail carrier at the time, remembered the industry vividly: "They'd let them dry and put'em in a sack and wrap th'sack around—tie'em up pretty tight and pack'em in a tow sack'r'cotton sack—and then they'd mail'em. I used t'be th'mailman around here, and I've brought lots a'packs a'hides in thataway. They'd sew th'sack up tight, and they'd have a tag, and they'd sew th'tag on there—or hook it on there with a copper hook—put their name on th'outside of it, and on th'other side 'ud be th'name of th'company it'uz goin' to. Th'company always furnished these tags, and then they'd ship'em. I carried lots of'em. Most all of'em went t'th'Funsten Fur Company in St. Louis. Some of'em went t'Memphis. They'uz a few that shipped t'Chicago. I think Sears and Roebuck used t'buy hides."

"And they'd send out price lists—sorta like this junk mail we call now. They'd put th'prices on there: so much for a possum skin so big and so on; so much for muskrats, and then a coon, and then wildcats and foxes."

None of'em hardly ever bought a rabbit skin because their skin is not stable enough—not strong enough t'be worth much.

"And when th'price lists didn't come, they'd [the people in the community] come back and say, 'What'd y'do with m'fur list!' They'd wait for that. And they'd usually come out from this time a'year [October] along up till about February. You had t'wait till along in th'fall, and then catch'em [animals] through th'winter and let'em dry out, and then ship'em along that way up until spring. You couldn't hardly sell hides caught before maybe th'first of September. They wouldn't buy them. They had t'be in th'season when th'hides was good. Th'hides were green in th'summertime, y'see. And they'uz another angle to it. They'uz a huntin' law that y'couldn't hunt those things back in th'rearin' season. And th'fur companies, in order t'keep their business up, they wouldn't buy'em then so th'people would stay within th'law. And then, th'hides was just naturally better when th'fur come out in fall for th'winter season. It'ud all shed out and be thin in th'summertime, y'see, and there wouldn't be much hair on that. Feller didn't want a fur coat with no hair on th'collar! In th'winter, th'hair on th'animals'ud begin t'come out and thicken up. Durin' th'summer they'd be a'sheddin'."

But by and large, almost all the hides tanned were used around the farm. Most people tanned their own. When they got someone to tan for them, however, they generally paid that person with part of the tanned hide. Julius Speed, for example, said, "I generally divided th'hide as near as I could in th'middle; and whoever I got th'hide from, he got that half and I kept th'other half."

The hides were used in a myriad of ways. Here, in note form, are some of them.

FOR BELL COLLARS, HARNESES, HORSE GEAR, SACK STRINGS, LINES, BRIDLES, AND HANG STRINGS:

Cowhide. Hair and tan in bark. Take strips and tie or staple the ends together. You could tie the ends together by punching holes in the wide strips and tying through the holes with thin strips.

FOR BANJO HEADS:

1. Groundhog. Remove hair with ashes; wash, stretch on banjo while moist. Can also tan if desired, but not necessary. [Also house cat, deer, squirrel may be used.]
2. Wildcat. Remove hair with brains. Stretch on banjo while moist.

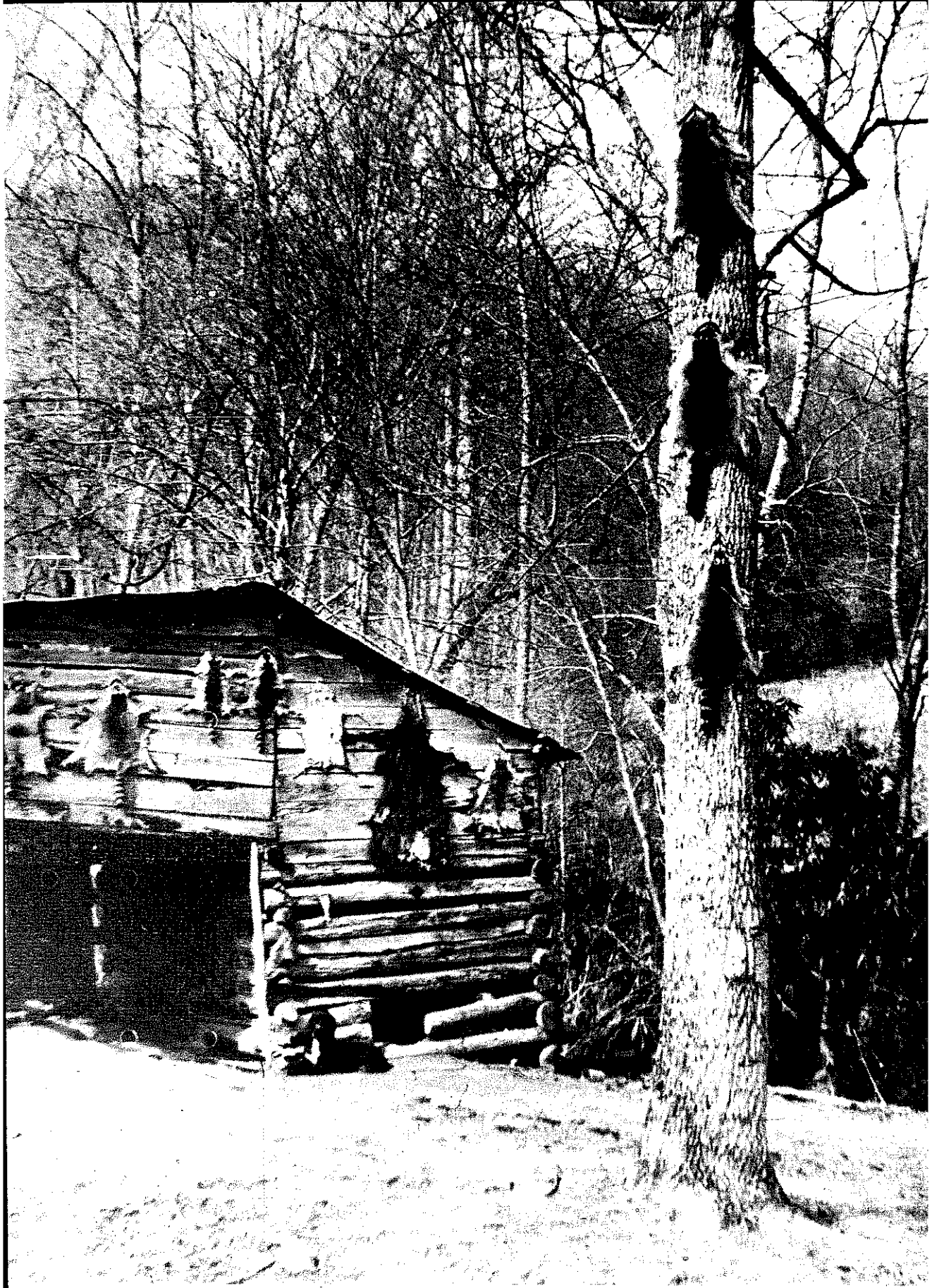


PLATE 34 Ray Conner, Minyard's son, has coon hides tacked on a tree in his yard to surprise passers-by.

FOR RUGS, SADDLE BLANKETS, SADDLE CUSHIONS:

Sheep skin. Tan with hair on. ("When I was a little kid, they'd take them to th' field and put them in th' shade of a tree for small children t' lay on while they was workin'."—R. R. Singleton. "We had one for th' baby t' sit on on th' floor before it could walk. He tanned me one—a great big one—and you could wash that—wash th' wool with a brush"—Mrs. Julius Speed.)

FOR SHOE STRINGS:

1. Calf skin. Hair and tan in bark, and cut into strips of desired width.
2. Deer skin. Same as calf skin.
3. Groundhog hide. Remove hair with ashes and water, work until dry, and cut. Can also tan if wished, but many didn't bother.
4. Squirrel hide (the favorite of most of our contacts). Same as groundhog. ("Now if you want real shoe laces like you was talkin' about before, you use squirrel hide"—Mary Green. According to R. M. Dickerson, if you cut straight down the hide where the backbone was, you could get a string long enough in one piece to lace a shoe.) Can also use this hide to sew up shoes when they rip.
5. Wildcat hide. Same as groundhog. ("I like t' use it. It'll stretch, and it's soft and tough."—Richard Norton.)
6. Raccoon. Take hair off with ashes and tan with alum.

FOR SHOES:

1. Cowhide. Remove hair, tan in bark; use thick part for soles and thin part for vamps. Use maple pegs to tack the sole to the vamp and thread greased with beeswax to sew pieces together.
2. Horsehide. Hair and tan in bark. ("But it won't turn water like cowhide"—Richard Norton.)

With all the above, some didn't even bother to hair the hides. They just dried them, cut off strips, and either burned the hair off, or drew the strip rapidly back and forth against a nail driven into a post to remove the hair.

CATTLE RAISING

as told by Mack Dickerson

Seventy-nine years is a long way to look back. Mack Dickerson looks back over that many years and is able to share the many changes—some good and some bad—that have come to Wolffork Valley. Living near him, you find that he is a uniquely interesting individual. Mack is a bachelor (he says he likes being his own boss) and he has lived by himself for most of his life. He's quiet and keeps to himself, but once you take the time to know him, you discover that his has been a full and crowded life worth sharing with those who will listen.

Mack's family moved to Wolffork in 1835 when the area was still very much a frontier. There were only four other non-Indian families in the valley: the Keeners, the Carters, the Pinsons, and one which Mack can't remember. Mack's father bought the land Mack lives on now from Grandpa Keener in 1896, and then built the hand-hewn log house that Mack still lives in. Its chimney was made of bricks made of lime, sand, and red dirt in back of Gay McClain's place on Betty's Creek. Until the railroad came to the county, the post office for the valley was located in the Dickerson home.

When Mack was a boy, he made blowguns with which to shoot wild cherries, swam a lot, gathered wild chestnuts, hunted rabbit with his father, and helped his mother with their garden. He got his first toy—a little wagon—in 1901 and still remembers it vividly today because toys were so rare in the community. He also loved playing pranks on people. Once he and his brothers took the wheel off his cousin's wagon and hung it in the top of a tree. His cousin had two men hired for the day to help him get in his corn, and the men wasted half a day hunting for the wheel.

By the time Mack was fifteen or sixteen, he was catching wild hogs. He caught his first one in 1911 with his Uncle John Moore's bird dog. He'd feed the hogs all summer and then kill them in the fall and salt them down



PLATE 35

for meat for the family. "I done a lot of that mountain going. I always enjoyed that. That's one reason I kept hogs and cows in the mountains—have an excuse to go." Eventually he gave up fooling with hogs, though, and concentrated on cattle because hogs were so much trouble. "You know you can't make a hog go backwards? He'll get his head caught in a fence and choke. Only way you can make him go backwards is just take a club and hit him on the nose and he'll back up *then*. You can put a rope around a hog's neck and he never will back out of it. He goes forwards all the time. Tie him out and graze him—he'll stay right there. Put you a rope around his neck pretty tight and he won't know nothing about backing out of it. You just try it and see!"

Mack's father died of stomach cancer in 1914 leaving behind four sons and three daughters. Mack had to stop school at the sixth grade and work to help keep the family going. They had a close family, and there was a Christian atmosphere in their home. "I never heard my daddy say an ugly word in his life," Mack recalls.

Mack held lots of different jobs during those days: he worked on public works, as a clerk with the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, and on farms all over the county. There were many days when he made only seventy-five cents a day.

Then came World War I. Mack volunteered for the Navy, and from

1918 to 1919 he served as radio messenger on the U.S.S. *Supply*. His ship was the first one to fire a shot in the war. When he was released, he came back home to the country. "I wouldn't live in a big city. All the noise and racket. I stayed in New York City twenty-two days one time. We tied up to the Ninety-sixth Street dock. It was the longest two weeks of time I ever spent. I just stayed over on that ship. You'd be out on Saturday evening—people just as far as you could see. I don't like that. I've been in all them big cities: Detroit, New York City, Philadelphia. And I've been all out in Idaho. Them old barren hills, and you don't see no trees. I get sick of that. There's old rocks a'sticking up and nothing *but* them. I just came back home."

Since there wasn't any regular work in the county when he returned, he did odd jobs. His farm buildings and fields needed repairs and attention. To get a little money, he hewed cross-ties for the railroad, cut acid wood, and worked in a sawmill. They were hard times, but Mack stuck with it, and today he owns twenty-five acres of pasture land, as well as a large piece of forest land on the side of a nearby mountain. And, of course, he has his cattle. "My cattle are what mean most to me now. If it weren't for them I'd be in the poorhouse. I sold \$4,000.00 worth of cows last year. I

PLATE 36 Mack with Terry York.





PLATE 37 Mack gathers dried corn from neighboring fields each fall, has it crushed, and uses it for winter feed.

could work all day raising corn and beans to sell and it wouldn't pay out at all."

Those cattle take up most of his time now. The rest of his time he spends listening to ball games (or, during season, attending all of Rabun Gap's basketball games), cooking his meals, and just passing time.

To the kids from the magazine who visit him, he says, "Pay off your debts. Tell the truth. Don't have too much money or you'll get greedy. Have a good reputation. Do as you wish to be done by."

TERRY YORK

Interviews and photographs by Gary Warfield, Karen Cox, Terry York, David Dillard, Steve Smith.

The man I bought my bull from said that breed was over three hundred years old. Not many people have them. The man who sold me the bull brought him down from Cleveland where he'd bought it. He said used to they never would sell a bull and heifer together, so two agents in the Barnum and Bailey circus got together and bought one of each and brought them here. Call them Holland Dutch, or Swiss Belted.

Meanest cow I ever had was a Charolais. I wouldn't have another one. And her calf is the same way. Take this Charolais calf I got. I got six calves down here. All come around about the same time. And that little old calf is wild as . . . The others will just come up. I hadn't fed them but a little bit and they'd be around up here. I'd go out about feed time—I

guess they're out there right now waiting on me to feed them—they just come on. And that thing—he won't come up. He liked to never come up and eat with them.

Another thing I found out. I used to be pretty lenient with my calves. I'd have four or five about the same age and go out to feed them and maybe want to put them in the barn or somewhere. Why, they'd get wanting to play, you know. Just like a gang of kids when you holler for them to come to the house for supper. They'll linger along behind, and the cows'll come. That's before they get big enough to eat, you know. Last winter it was muddy and bad like this winter. They'd go up there and the cows would come running to the barn, you know, knowed they was going to get fed. And them little old calves a'running and playing—just stay out. I got to putting my dog on them. Some dogs—I got one here—wouldn't run a little calf to save her life. But that shepherd my brother had up here, I can send him up there—tell him to go up there and get them calves. He'll go up there and run them in about three times. Then next time you go out there and call your cows—holler up at them—when they starts, them calves come *with'em*! Dog learns them a lot.

I had one yesterday out there—he didn't want to go in. Put that dog on him. He went t'beller. That dog makes them beller and scares them. Calf'll follow that cow after you get him scared thataway. He'd follow her into torment if she'd go!

Mack has evolved his own personal approach to stock and his farm from years of observing others, and from years of trial and error. He says firmly that, "farming has improved 500 percent over what it was back in those days." Those technical improvements, combined with the polishing of his own techniques over the last forty years, have made his life now a comfortable, if not a wealthy one.

Things weren't always that way:

We used to plow with horses, plant with our hands, put manure out, work the corn, hoe it about three times with all the kids out in the fields, plow it about three or four times with an old slow mule. I never did plow with no oxen, but lots of people did. They didn't fertilize any back then. They just used manure. Back when I was a kid, they didn't anybody make a hundred bushels, I don't guess, here in this valley. Then they got to putting lime on and they got pretty productive. No fertilizer when I was a kid. We had no railroad back in them days. I never had seen a hundred pound of cottonseed meal till I was ten or twelve years old. Railroad come here in 1905 and got to hauling this meal. But before then we were hauling everything in and out of wagons.

Didn't know much about caring for stock. Fed calves flour for scours.

And hollow tail—my uncle ran cows in the woods. They'd get poor in the wintertime and he'd drive them in, and they was weak and wobbling everywhere, you know. And one of them got down, and he split her tail and put a little salt in it and wrapped it up. Said she got up after a while and come on in! He was an old-timer. They believed in all that stuff. Sometimes you *can* feel their tail [near the base] and it's just like it's been broke [but salt won't fix it].

And the hollow horn. Used to be all the cattle was horned in this country when I was a boy. And they'd take and saw their horns off with a hand saw. They'd half feed them through the winter and they'd be poor in the spring and couldn't walk and wobble around everywhere, and they'd saw their horns off! That's silly because *every* big cow that's got horns on that's hollow!

And I've saw people take a iron and get it right hot and drill a little hole in their head right in here up next to their ear. Said that was good for hollow horn!

There wasn't no meadows back when I was a kid—just corn fields. My great-granddaddy said he had *one* up here. He cleared up that old swamp ground and pulled the stumps out of it and cut it by hand. Stacked it. Didn't have no hay rakes. Never heard tell of that. They'd take and rake it up with pitchforks—cot it up, what we call cots—big pile of it. Then they'd get two little long skim poles and run under it and one man get between them and pack it out. Stack it then in great big stack for feed. Just put'em a pole in the ground and stack it around and around piled up against the pole, and just keep on till you run out the top. I've stacked hundreds of stacks like that. Twenty-foot pole, maybe. At least ten or twelve or fourteen.

Until the time stock laws that required all stock to be fenced in at the farm itself were passed, most stock ran loose in the woods and grazed on what they could find. Dairy cows were kept close to the farm for daily milking, but the others were taken out in the spring, turned loose to range, and then gathered to be fed at home through the winter.

There was no pastures. Our cows were turned out. Lay around in the bushes. Had to chase them in to milk them. Get wet all over in them wet bushes. We didn't make hay. Just corn and fodder.

And we kept hogs. I let them run in the woods and eat the acorns. We'd lose a few back in the woods—never know what come of them. They'd die, some of them would. Get that milksick. Couldn't get home. It'd kill them. Or some were stolen by them too lazy to work. But not many.

We'd mark the stock's ears. Everyone had his own mark so he could tell whose was whose. Our mark was two swallowforks and a hole in the right. There was lots of combinations (see *Plate 38*):

The basic alphabet:

Swallow fork:



(shaded portions are cut out)
over half crop



underbit:



under half crop



overbit:



split



crop



hole



An example:

"Swallow fork and an underbit
in the right, and a crop and 2
splits in the left - Wm. E. Philpaw - July 25, 1854



PLATE 38

Some had some of the awfullest darn marks I ever heard tell of. Swallow-fork and underbit in the right and split in the left. Always marked the right and left. I saw a bunch of cattle in Atlanta down at a calf show way back in 1930, I guess—somewhere back in there. They said they come from Mexico. They had them cut all to pieces. I couldn't even read their mark.

We used to range our cattle in the mountains. Had an old cow here one time, and she was heavy with calf, and I was wanting to take the rest of my cows to the woods in the spring of the year. So I decided I'd just leave her here, and when her calf got up about a week or two old, why I'd take her on out there too. Chase them up in the woods. They don't ramble off much in the spring. Stay around pretty good. Thought I'd put a bell on her.

Well, I went up there to Tate City and backed up and turned my cow out and put the bell on her. She never had a bell on before in her life. And they got out of the truck and away she went t'running. That bell scared the calf too. Man, had a heck of a time. Calf got away from the mother, and I stayed around there and worried with her for about two or three hours, and that little old calf wouldn't come out to her. Finally, I believed I heard [the other cows] a way up there on the mountain. I went out to my other

- Georgia } Before me James M. Dullon
 Rabun County } a Justice of the peace in and
 for said County. Personally came William C. Price
 who being duly sworn deposes and says that
 his stock mark is a smooth crop of over
 the right ear and a shale in the left ear
 Sworn to and Subscribed before me this 19th
 July 1894
 James M. Dullon, J.P.
 W. C. Price
 Recorded this 19th July 1894
 W. C. Price Clerk

Georgia, } Personally comes
 Rabun County } A. M. Keener, before
 the undersigned, who
 on oath says that his stock mark
 is as follows. A smooth crop and
 an under bit in the right ear, and
 a under half crop in the left ear.
 Sworn to and subscribed
 before me this 12th day of
 June, 1890.
 W. A. Long,
 Ordinary
 A. M. Keener

Georgia } Before me James M. Sullivan
Rabun County } a Justice of the Peace in and for
said County Personally came Jesse Lowell
Depereth and says that his stock mark is
a swallow fork in each ear sworn to and
subscribed before me this 25th of July 1894
James M. Sullivan P. J. Jesse Lowell

State of Georgia
Rabun County } personally appeared before
the undersigned John W.
Hallifield who being duly sworn, says
on oath that his stock mark is a swallow
fork in the left ear and an over-
bit in the right ear.
Sworn to and subscribed before me
this 22nd day of December 1894.

J. A. Blackley
Filed and Recorded } Ordinary N.C.
Dec 22nd 1894 J. A. Blackley }
Ordinary N.C.

Georgia, Rabun County
Personally appeared before
me H. D. Dockins who on oath
says that his stock mark is
a half crop on the top side of
the right ear and a
half crop on the under side
of the left ear.
H. D. Dockins
mark

Sworn to and subscribed
before the 8th day of Oct 1906
W. T. James
Ordinary

cattle. Come back down there and he'd got with her then and I drove her on up the creek and she got in there with them. But boy that scared me. I couldn't find the calf nor the dog either. He'd run off and hid somewhere'r'nother and just left her there, you know. But she wouldn't leave at all [with that calf gone].

Then, first black cow I had here—half Durham and half black—decided to take her to the mountains. She'd run one summer in the mountains as a heifer. Next spring I decided I'd put a bell on her. And there was a great big old ditch out there from the barn. And I put a bell on her a few days before I took them out, you know. And boy I never heard such jumping up and down and bellering in my life. She got down in that old big ditch and stayed all day. She'd happen to sling her head and wouldn't think and that bell'd ring and she'd take another trip!

They just have to get used to it.

You could get out in the woods, though, and salt them, and they'd hear you go to calling, and boy you never heard [the nke] coming down off of them mountains just a flying to get that salt. And if they was anybody else's with them, they'd come too!

Sometimes I'd team up with four others on Persimmon, and we'd put all of our cattle in together. Then we'd bring them in in the fall and separate them out. We done that up there at Big Bald one time, and I never did get as mad in my life. Grade Ledford went with me up there, and Eddie. I'd been the day before and I knew where one bunch was up there. Couldn't find the other. We pulled up over at the mountain, and Grady was going to drive them down the Coleman River. Me and Eddie was going over on what we called between the Bald and Shooting Creek in there, and separate all them out and bring them down there. Pick him up.

Well, we got them all separated out and walked down there—we was gone three or four hours, I guess—and he was going to meet us at what we called the Wheeler Fields. And we come down through there and the bells a'rattling and going on, and couldn't hear no tell of Grade nowhere. And we got down there and stopped, and after while he got to hollering a way up there on the side of Little Bald, and it about dark then. Him mad, too.

Got up there and he had a bunch of them in there. They was a lot of acorns that fall, and they was just going through them cliffs a'hunting acorns, you know. And he couldn't do a thing in the world with them by hisself. Had them here and here and there, and they was just a'going around them rock cliffs and over logs. We finally got them all surrounded up, and—I always used a walking stick up there—I flew in there trying to run them

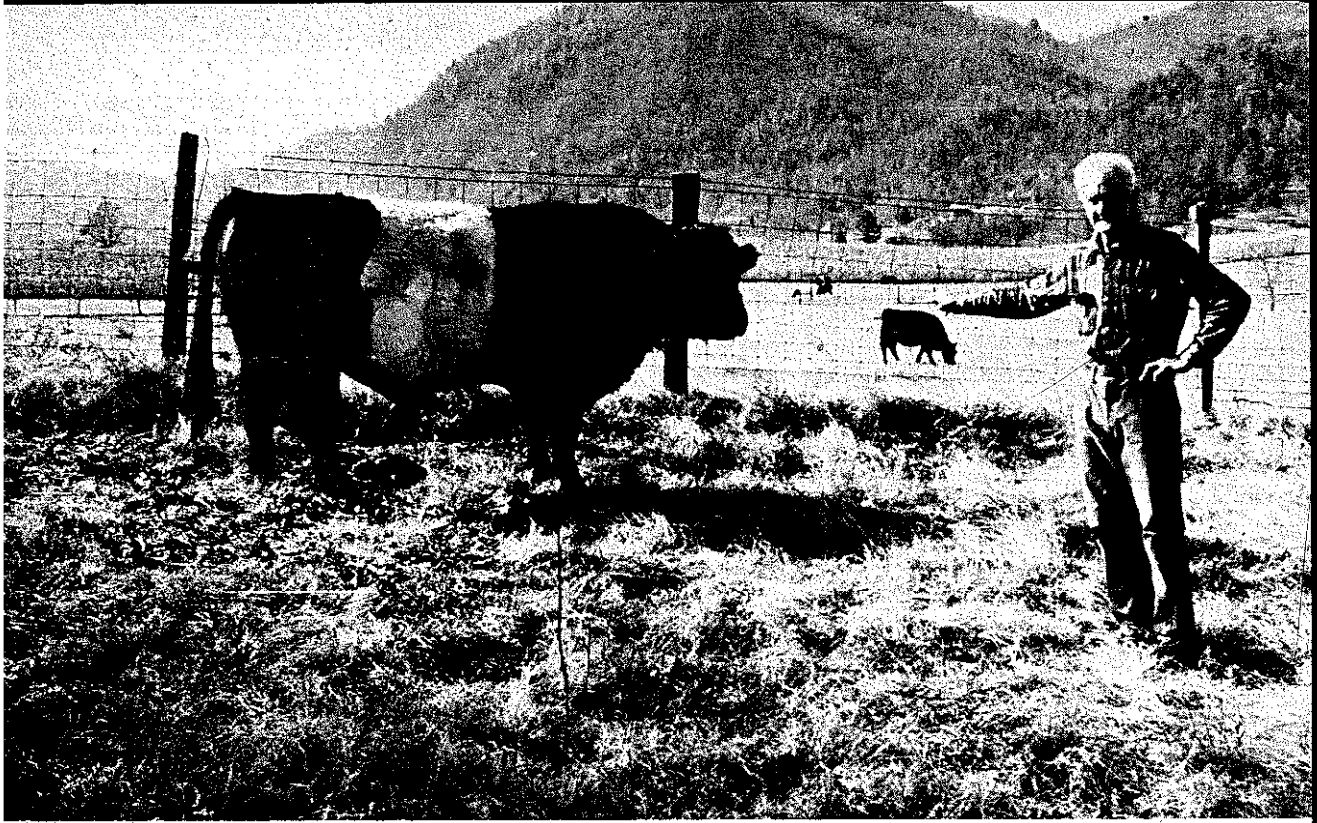


PLATE 41 Mack with his Dutch-belted herd bull.



PLATE 42 Mack's dogs aren't just pets. They help him round up his cows and calves.



PLATE 43' Mack begins and ends every fall and winter day by toting a bale of hay out to the pasture for his cattle.



PLATE 44



PLATE 45



PLATE 46

downhill. And we had them all hemmed up there, and I was a'using my walking stick on them, and some of them pulled down the rock cliff there and slid plumb from here to that fence out yonder! We finally got them all separated in and got them all down there and had to leave them and go back the *next* day and get them.

But he'd been all that evening trying to run them out and never *had* got them down. It was five hours, I guess. Six. I could hear him hollering. He'd lost his dinner. And he had a rope and he'd lost *it*! We had some terrible times with this cow business.

Sometimes they'd get over on the Shooting Creek side and go as far as Highway 64. And that's a long ways. Head of Buck Creek. And they was bad to get down on Nantahala.

I had two and Kate [Decatur] Burrell had two up there the year the war ended in 19 and 45. You know we never got those cattle in till the sixth day of February! That was the year them forest [Forest Service] fellers had the little deer over there—they'd brought the deer in here. But they was there and had a little place fenced out and sowed in with rye for [the deer]. And they had some field glasses with them and saw some cattle up there on the side of the mountain. Said one of them had a hole in its ear. I'd been over there inquiring to him about them, and he sent me word that they was over there. And we pulled over there and couldn't find them!

They'd been three or four snow storms that winter up in there. We'd find their sign all around there. Finally that forest feller put them up down there. He was a'camping there looking after the deer, and he'd go home every weekend. Finally he got ahold of them and put them in a stall over there. Didn't have nobody over there to help him water them or nothing, so he finally turned them out. We went back one Sunday morning over there and tracked them. He'd had to turn them out that night since we didn't come—we were a long time about getting the word or something—so he'd turned them out and we took their tracks out up what they call the Curtis Branch. Found them up there and drove them home. Sanford Garland was at the post office looking for mail from some of his boys in the service and saw us go by and asked what we were doing driving cattle. I said, "We're just getting them in from taking them out last spring."

He went up there and looked at them. Said, "Them's fatter'n them I got at home, and me feeding them all the time! Wonder what that [Forest Service] feller'd take to run *mine* over there!"

You know them old big ferns? You ever see them out here in the woods? Ones that stay green all winter? That's what they lived on. And they'd get up under those cliffs out of rain and sleet.

But you could trust people then. I lost a few over there, but not many. People would send you word, and you'd do the same. Them old folks is all

dead and gone now. All of them honest. They'd tell you where your cattle was at. Just worked through each other, you know. You can't trust nobody, nowadays. Or believe nothing they say, hardly. Ain't like them old-timers.

Mack can feel things changing all around him. He's concerned about the energy crisis, but says, "I'd live it the same way I did, but I'd hate to live it over from now on. But, I'm ready to go back to wood anytime."

He's more concerned about people that are "too busy working just trying to make a dollar. It's good in a way, but a neighbor needs some help some time, and a feller hates to bother 'em when they've got these regular jobs."

He is also deeply concerned about certain farming practices he sees now, and about the steady influx of new, part-time families that fragment the sense of community that once existed:

They've got so there's not many people farming nowadays, you know? Feller used to be his own boss—didn't have no one to come around to tell him what to do. I don't like to be bossed. Them fellers that you give a farm to [hire to work for you], you just as well to throw them in the river. You've got to work it out yourself.

I never did go into debt much. If I wanted a little money at the bank, I'd go out there and they'd give me however much I wanted in the fall, and then pay them back. If you borrow and they've got to sue you to get it back, then there ain't no use to go back [to them again]. Kinda pay your way.

Course, land's got awful high now. These people come in here, buy it all up. They buy it here and just leave it trying to make a dollar on it. Don't care about the fellers that was raised here. Not a penny.

It's always been a funny idea to me. Bunch of people [from outside] bought up some land here and tried a cattle business. I went up and looked. They hired everything done. Never came around. I was up there one spring, and the cattle all poor and about dead. Calves around there that couldn't stand up. They didn't feed 'em. Just let it go to the dogs. You can't do that. You've got to be there and oversee it yourself.

I knew a rich man that bought a summer home here. He took a notion he wanted to get into the cattle business. Talked me into going with him to an auction to buy a thoroughbred black bull. Then he talked more about dogs and hunting than bulls. Showed off his trophies. Gave \$600.00 for a bull and didn't even have a pasture or feed. Just had money. Man sold him his hay. Fed him in a mudhole. I never saw one around here nowhere yet that could hire people to look after [their stock]—and them good workers and everything—that could keep them up.

Now they're buying land for the investment. I'd like to see a lot of them stay out here. They're ruining our country. Come in here and post it.

That's the first thing they think about. We never used to think about posting nothing back when I was a kid. Never heard tell of posting land. And they come in here from the city up in here and drive their jeeps around, or buy land and try to get the old roads closed. You take these old roads—I don't care if nobody ain't been on them in fifty years—you can't go and stop them up. Take the road we got goes around up here on our mountain. Been using it for a hundred years—different landowners, you know. And some of them bought this land in there since then and wants to stop *that* road up. That was built when my grandfather owned the land and it's been there ever since I can remember. Now they want to stop it up. They just come up here and think they can just go and do everyway and keep you out.

Take what the government owns, and the outside people, and there wouldn't be much of Rabun left. Some of them may get ahold of this and not like what I say about it, but that's all right.

ANIMAL CARE

Today, farmers can specialize and raise hogs, chickens, cattle, or horses, or they can raise only vegetables or grains, without an animal on the whole place. But years ago, because families had to rely almost entirely on themselves for food, shelter, and clothing, raising, working, and eating animals was an absolutely necessary and integral part of farm life. In order to be nearly self-sufficient, which families had to be in the mountains, they needed a wide assortment of animals. They didn't have them as pets or for fun—they needed them to live and didn't have much choice. This is not to say that people didn't enjoy their animals, but they were very dependent on each other, and even the animals themselves were interdependent.

People fed the animals and the animals fed the people. For instance, the mules (or steers or horses) that pulled the plow to cultivate the land to grow corn, produced manure to fertilize the corn, hauled the manure out to the pasture from the barn in the wagon, hauled the mature corn in the wagon from the pasture to the barn for storage, and hauled some of the corn to the market to sell. They ate their share of that corn, too, and so did the hogs, ducks, chickens, sheep, geese, guineas, etc. It would have been difficult to raise any animals at all without one or more beasts of burden. In addition to the work and manure produced, the horses reproduced both themselves and the mules (with a little help from a neighbor's jack), and the steers, when too old to work, were fattened and eaten. I could go on for pages trying to clarify the relationships among the farmers and their animals, but I'll let you infer them from the people's own comments.

All the animals on a farm were kept for a definite reason—some animals may have become pets, but animals were not acquired as pets, and even a pet had to make itself useful, or it wasn't feasible to keep it. Dogs were kept for hunting, protection, and herding the other animals, such as sheep and cattle. Cats were primarily used to keep the rodent population under control, because rats and mice would eat almost anything they could get to. People kept ducks and geese primarily for their feathery down for pillows



PLATE 47 Carlton English feeding some of his animals. The goose adopted the cow on the left, follows her around the pasture, and sleeps with her in the stall.

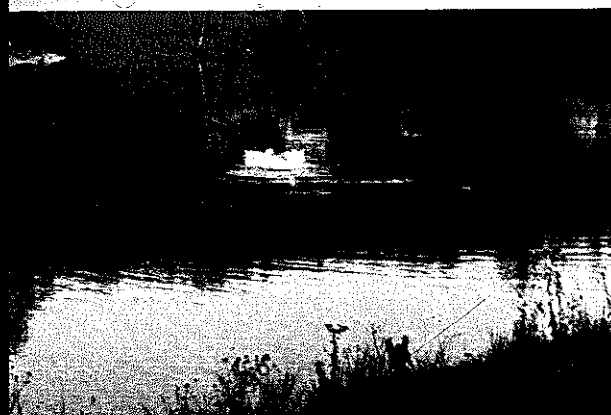


PLATE 48 Ducks belonging to Mariinda and Harry Brown's grandchildren, swimming in Brown's pond.

and feather beds and some also ate their eggs and meat. Chickens were very versatile; people ate the eggs and meat, sold chicks and eggs, and traded them for other goods at the store. Guineas, on the other hand, provided only eggs, and announced the arrival of anyone or anything. Few people had turkeys, which were raised primarily for meat. Goats, not common either, were kept for milk. Many families had sheep which were mainly kept for their wool. People would usually eat some of the young lambs, and sell or trade the ones they didn't need. Everyone raised hogs, because pork can be cured and kept without refrigeration. The hogs provided the family's main source of protein, and the sale of extra piglets also provided

a small income. Cattle, too, were very useful. Cows provided milk, calves were sold or eaten, steers (castrated bulls) were used for work and transportation, and the cows and steers were fattened and eaten when they became too old for other work. They all provided manure to fertilize crops, and many people used the tanned hides for various purposes.

Mules and horses didn't have as many uses, but many preferred them to steers for working. They provided faster transportation as well as providing manure for the crops.

This chapter is not meant to be a manual of animal husbandry, but I think you will learn something from it. We also hope it helps you to better understand the southern Appalachian farmers of years ago. Each family's animals were vital to the family's survival, and people spent hours and hours during their lifetime around and about their animals.

Researched and photographed by Sheila Vinson, Janet Dickerson, Cathy D'Agostino, and Cathy Campbell.

GEESE

ESCO PITTS: [We ate geese eggs] but I didn't like 'em—they're strong. We plucked geese, too. My mother'd hold a goose and pick the feathers just like she would a duck. You can get half a pillow's worth of feathers off a goose. Goose-feather pillows are nice.

Our house was up on pillars, and the geese could go under the house, or under the crib and sit there in severe weather. Now th'crib was up off the ground, and the geese usually stayed under there, because there were some cracks in the floor of the crib, and the corn sometimes would fall through the cracks, and the chickens and the geese both liked that.

DUCKS

JESS RICKMAN: Ducks never were any trouble—my mother used to keep twenty-five or thirty of 'em. An' she made and gave all her children a set of feathers and a feather bed each.

Ducks'll thrive around and catch bugs and eat grass, and don't take too much corn except during the winter season when they'll eat a good deal.

With a duck, you have to start picking 'em when they get full-feathered, and you have to watch and pick 'em every new of the moon. They loosen up and aren't hard to pull off. If you let 'em run over [the new of the moon], they're real hard to pull off and it's rough on the duck. My mother'd leave her other chores go, and pick her ducks and geese at a certain time.

Geese and ducks both are hard on your garden—they like tomatoes,

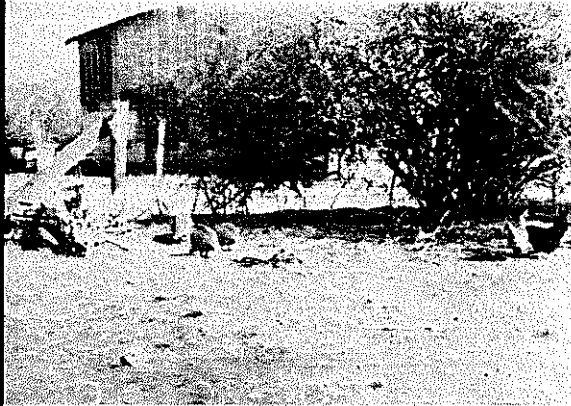


PLATE 49 Guinea in Carlton English's barnyard.



PLATE 50 Some of Carlton English's chickens.

watermelons, cabbage, and bean blossoms. There's not much difference in the way you feed ducks and geese.

Ducks'll have a few worms if they don't have a good-sized place to run around in.

ESCO PITTS: Now ducks are something we didn't bother with much—they make their own living. A stream went down by the house, and those ducks usually stayed in that stream up and down and around. We'd have t'feed'em a little, but you didn't have to feed them much—they'd make their own way.

My mother'd pick the feathers from the ducks and make feather pillows. That's the reason she had ducks.

We'd eat the eggs. Duck eggs are good, but my daddy wouldn't eat a duck—wouldn't let us kill the ducks.

[In order to pluck duck feathers], my mother put the duck's head right back under her arm, took a hold of his two feet in her hand, and pulled the feathers th'wrong way [against the "grain"]. She could pick a duck in ten minutes, and get a great big pile of feathers. The ducks were used to it.

They didn't run away from her, and I think one time a year was all she picked 'em. They'd have t'get full-feathered.

LON DOVER: People kept ducks to make feathers. We have some old feather beds and pillows now—they'll last fifty years. When the ticking wears out, you get some new ticks and put your old feathers in there, and they'll wear on and on.

Once in a while, people would eat ducks and duck eggs, but we never did.

The ducks would go under the floor of the house and roost. You had to feed them year 'round—the more you feed 'em the more feathers they'll have. You just catch 'em up by the feet, and pick their feathers. Sometimes people will tear the skin. You have to be pretty careful about it. If you don't pick 'em they'll pick their feathers themselves. Pick about once a month—pick 'em and drop 'em in a bag. We just fed 'em corn.

Once in a while a hog would kill one—if the duck was sick, the hog would kill 'im and eat 'im.

TURKEYS

JESS RICKMAN: We used to raise turkeys, just to eat and a few to sell, but we didn't have 'em [eating] a lot and they got to takin' too wide a range around. You can't manage a turkey to do any good.

BEULAH PERRY: We took care of turkeys just about like we would chickens. They take a little more special care. They were weakling before they got grown—you had to take very good care of them. You couldn't let them get out early in the morning in the dew and get wet.

GUINEAS

KENNY RUNION: Lots of folks had guineas. They'd lay—I don't mean maybe. They'd lay from th'time th'bud swelled till way up in the fall.

Now if I had guineas here, I might find their nest on the other side of them trailers. They don't lay in the front door. They might go a mile. They make a noise you'd know if you were used to them.

I never heard tell of [guineas eating your garden]. I don't believe they'll bother nothing. They might eat the worms and bugs off of the vegetables, but they won't eat the beans or nothing like that.

ESCO PITTS: We had a few guineas—the eggs are the biggest things. Y'know, they lay a lot of eggs. They go in th'trees and roost—they wouldn't

go in a chicken house. Finding them nests was a big job. They just go a way off, and first thing you know they've got a whole nest of eggs. We had t'feed them, too. They eat more than chickens. And they'll eat all the insects in your garden.

We ate guinea eggs. They're a prolific thing. They lay a nest plumb full of eggs. They'd hide their nests—you'd have to watch where they gathered a lot and you could find their nests.

We just had a few. A guinea can just get up and fly away, and they're a noisy kind of bird. They're always a'hollering, and the geese are the same way.

We lived three-four hundred yards from the road, and if any stranger came in through that gate, those guineas would go to squalling. They're just like a watchdog. They'd bite you. Guineas eat the bugs [in the garden]; they're good to keep any kind of insects off. They aren't half as bad as chickens [about eating up your garden].

CHICKENS

ETHEL CORN: Some people would have chicken houses for chickens to go in to roost, but some chickens would just run around and make their nest anywhere in the barns or anywhere they could and roost up in the trees.

The chickens were turned out where they could scratch. An' you know chickens liked that. You wouldn't think that there'd be any difference in the taste of the meat in those that they raised in these brooder houses, and in the ones raised in the open. But there's a wide difference; they're as good again. And we never fed laying mash'r'nothing like that to our chickens. They didn't get a thing but corn or rye.

Most of the chickens would lay eggs around the barn'r'around the building. Some would lay eggs up under the floor. Some would come in and lay'em on the porch. Just anywhere they could find to make'em a nest. Sometimes they'd make their nests up on the mountain. Part of the time you'd find'em and part of the time they'd be settin' before you could find them. When they'd lay their eggs, they'd go to setting. They'd come off the nest once a day, and that's all—come off to eat. And if you'd watch and catch'em there, then you could watch'em go back to their nests. But if they ever seen you watchin'em, they'd sneak away another way. They wouldn't go near their nest till you weren't around to watch'em.

[When the chicks were born], they'd keep as many of the roosters as they wanted and they'd kill the others when they were ready. If you don't have the roosters with the hens, the eggs won't hatch. [The roosters] are good to eat when they're young, but after a rooster gets grown, his meat has a tendency to be tougher.

Just nearly any kind of a wild animal will catch chickens—hogs, mink, weasels, possums, owls. Foxes are awful bad after a chicken.

Chickens will have cholera. And they have what's called the "weak leg." Their legs just get so weak they can't go. And they'll take the disease they call the "limber neck." It seems like their head just twists and jerks back ever' way. Why, I've killed as high as five or six big pretty hens of Mommie's that had taken the weak leg and they'd kill'em and tote'em off to keep it from spreading.

BEULAH PERRY: We had a great big chicken house and a lot for the chickens made out of palings—you know, we didn't have wire back in those days.

We fed those chickens crushed corn or wheat.

We had a lot of chickens. In those days, it wasn't strange to go to somebody's house who had two hundred or more chickens. Once in a while, we'd get eggs up to sell, and my dad would take'em to town to sell'em, or maybe they'd sell two or three fryers t'get little things we didn't have on the farm.

Some of the times, we let th'chickens run around and scratch, but most of the time, you'd have gardens and chickens was bad t'get into the garden. They would eat th'worms off th'cabbage, but then they'd get to where they'd eat th'cabbage, too! We were so glad when Dad and Mom would let the chickens run out because if the chickens didn't get in there and pick them worms off, we would have to. We cut down the number of roosters—seems like they'd keep six or seven chickens to a rooster.

Polecats was bad t'come in and catch the chickens at night—the chicken house wasn't closed up real tight. My daddy would keep the door open unless things would get to botherin' them too bad. A weasel was bad t'get in th'chickens. They'd get in there and eat the chickens. The chickens would get sick—sometimes their heads would get sore. I don't know what caused that.

ESCO PITTS: We had a chicken house, where they roosted of a night, and where we'd set'em for hatching little baby chicks. It had a roof on it, poles for'em t'sit on, boxes around in the walls for the hens t'lay. You could close it up t'keep animals out, or when you wanted t'catch any of'em when y'wanted t'sell'em or anything. Of a mornin', we'd turn'em out. They had free range, anywhere they wanted to go. We would have t'feed them a little, but they'd scratch out a lot of worms, bugs.

In the spring after the warm weather started, my mother would grind up red pepper and feed'em—that'd make their comb turn just as red, and they'd go t'laying. That's where we got our eggs for our breakfast ever' morning.



PLATE 51 Fred Darnell's sheep waiting to be sheared.

Chickens didn't usually lay in the coldest part of the winter, but in warm weather, they start layin'. A good hen won't lay much longer than three years, then y'kill'em and eat'em or sell'em for meat. Most of the time, we'd kill'em and eat'em.

I remember a bald eagle came into our chickens one night and picked up a hen and carried it off. Those bald eagles, they're big things, and they used to be lots of them in our country.

GOATS

BUCK CARVER: We used t'keep goats—let'em run all over. We'd kill them an' eat'em, sell one occasionally, but we never milked'em. A mother goat was lucky if she could make enough milk t'give to a kid. We'd use that hide—we could sell it, tan it and make shoelaces out of it, or make a whip out of it. Our big trouble with'em was durn dogs. They'd come an' kill'em ever' once in a while.

They're easy t'take care of, an' hard to make sick. They'll eat anything; live off the wrappers off tin cans an' be fat, too. They're good in particular barbecued.

SHEEP

ANNA HOWARD: We had a lot of sheep—we got th'wool; we sheared'em

washed the wool, carded it, spun it, wove it on a loom and made cloth. We had homemade clothes. I despised shearin' sheep. Had big old sheep shears: I've sheared many a sheep. Sheared'em in th'spring in the new moon in May. They had little lambs born in early spring. They was the sweetest little things I ever played with.

JESS RICKMAN: It's best to have a barn on account of the little lambs. My father used to have a barn out yonder about sixty feet long that he kept his sheep in. He had anywhere from fifty to sixty in the flock.

My father sold the wool—he'd ship it out to Greenville, South Carolina. It was lots of work if you used it at home. But we had to shear them. We'd get a table, and lay the sheep on it, tie their feet, and shear them. I guess it took twenty to twenty-five minutes but I'd average thirty minutes. The average sheep'd give us two and a half pounds of wool and the real large ones, about three pounds. We sheared them early in the spring, had to go by the weather, by the putting out of the leaves, and again in the late summer or early fall, in time for them to put on a new coat for the winter.

Sheep start lambin' in the first of February till way up in May. Everybody kept rams—one or two to fifty head. We'd eat the male babies mostly; they'd come in off the range about every two or three weeks and get salt, and Daddy'd pick out a nice heavy one to butcher. Most of the old people would kill a sheep, hog, and beef and have a big barbecue—mutton, pork, and beef.

[Sheep are apt to take cold, from] cold rains—pneumonia's what we called it. We'd keep'em fastened up in the barn in bad rainy times (to keep them from getting pneumonia) and we hardly ever had any with colds.

They'll get worms—the old people would burn hickory and give the ashes to'em, and I think they'd mix cornmeal with turpentine and give that to'em. But we weren't bothered years ago with worms like they are now. I guess they have a dozen cases to our one, because they don't run out on the wild range, and I believe that played a big part with keeping them healthy.

Wildcats and wolves and dogs are bad on sheep. The old people would put a bell on the sheep, and they said the wildcats didn't seem to bother one with a bell on it like they did without a bell. My father never did, but he lost lots of'em.

They notched the ears of the sheep—something like a slit in the left ear and an undercrop, just a notch, cut out of the right ear. But my father's was just a cut off the tip to the end of the ear. Each man had a different mark. The old-timers all knew each other's mark through Rabun County, Towns County, and Macon County.

BERTHA DOCKINS: My daddy had no more than twenty-five or thirty sheep at a time. They ran loose until time for 'em t'lamb, an' then they'd get 'em up. They stayed out all winter, but he had to get out like he did the hogs—go feed 'em. They huddle together in sheltered-like places in the winter. And then at shearin' time, we'd have t'herd 'em down from the mountains.

I've held many a sheep for my mommy and daddy while they sheared the sheep. That's when they look so pitiful—when they get all that wool off. We sheared 'em twice a year. They had spring wool. That was the prettiest. And then they had fall wool. We'd shear 'em about October in the fall, because they wanted it to grow back before it got cold weather.

He'd bring salt, cornmeal and corn up to the sheep. He'd just put th'stuff down in piles, and they'd find it. And they'd be right there the next time when he went back.

It got t'where he couldn't hardly keep sheep. There was so many wild animals—wildcats and things that'd get 'em, an' the lambs when they're young are easy t'get. They didn't used t'have diseases then like they do now. M'daddy just always counted on losing some ever' year.

ESCO PITTS: The sheep were taken care of just like the cattle. Sheep would range further away than the cattle, b'cause they didn't have to come home. But in the spring of the year, during the lambin' season, we had t'watch after them pretty close. Sheep would wander way off; they'd have t'come in in the lambin' season, take care of the small lambs, then they'd have t'be sheared when warm weather come. That's the way our mother made our clothes—with the wool.

They sheared the sheep one time a year. My mother would shear some, but Daddy done most of it. She could do it all right, but she was usually busy with her work in the house. She had t'weave the cloth to make our clothes, she had t'card it and spin it; she had a loom where she wove it, so it just kept her busy till the dead hours of the night t'get th'cloth that we needed. In the rough, just as you took wool off a sheep, sometimes you'd get five pounds of wool off of one sheep. Of course it wouldn't weigh that much after it's washed, cleaned, and carded. They were sheared and after the lambs got big enough t'follow, why we'd turn 'em back out and let 'em go. 'Course we'd have t'go look after 'em ever so often, salt 'em, keep 'em tame, give 'em a little corn. Then in the winter, we'd have t'bring 'em in—we had a sheep house that they'd stay in of a night, and of a daytime they'd run out and browse around.

They's always what they call the bellwether—that's a male sheep that's been altered and he was generally the leader of the flock. Put a bell on him and they'd follow him anywhere he went. And my father had a ram or two.

Bobcats was bad t'catch little lambs. I don't remember us having any trouble with wolves, but the bald eagles would pick up a little lamb.

Sheep are pretty delicate animals, and sometimes they'd get poisoned, and you wouldn't know what'd poisoned 'em, and they'd die.

HORSES AND MULES

ETHEL CORN: Horses were generally kept in the pasture fenced in for them, and they were kept in the barn at night. They fed the horses fodder and corn and hay. If you had a good pasture, when they weren't working, why you'd feed 'em night and morning. If it was a good pasture, maybe you wouldn't feed 'em but once a day. You'd just give 'em corn. And if you were working them, you always fed 'em three times a day to keep 'em good and strong and in shape to do the work.

PLATE 52 Cathy Campbell feeding Marinda and Harry Brown's old mule, Kate.

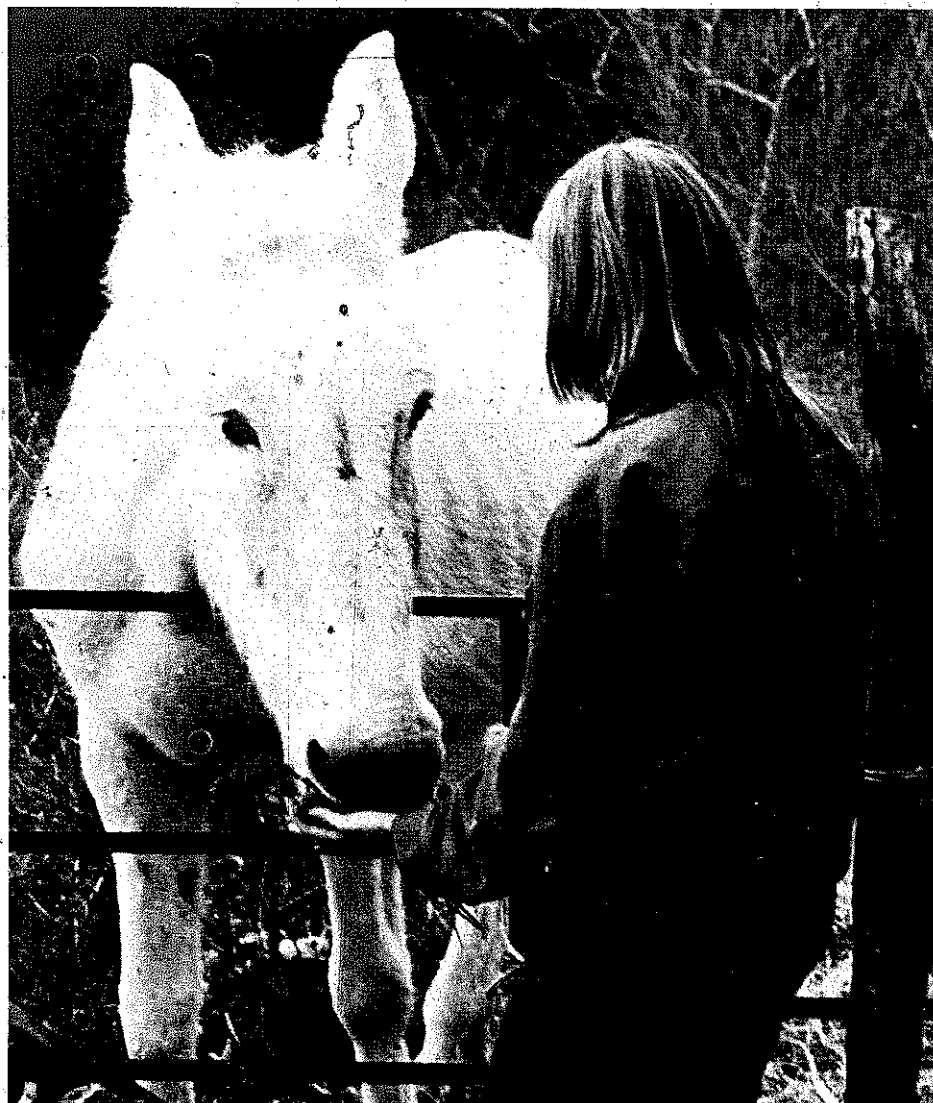




PLATE 53 Billy Long's horses grazing in his pasture.

We always curried and brushed them down good. Some people would let a mare raise a colt every year. They generally bred in the spring of the year. And some people would work a mare on up till just a week or two before the colt was due. And then they'd quit working'em, and wouldn't work'em after they had their colt till the colt was a couple of months old.

They'd stop the mare from working in order that she not be strained. They always let a colt nurse until it was about three months old; then they were weaned gradually. If the colts weren't weaned gradually, the mare had to be milked. And some of'em you couldn't milk—they'd kick your head off if you tried.

JESS RICKMAN: A draft horse is a large horse, and it's not raised here in this mountain country. There's a saddle type and a work type. For work, you need a heavy draft horse, weigh up to a ton. You've got to pet'em more to get along with horses good, have lots of patience and work. I'm gentle with'em—then I can get'em to do most anything for me. They won't stand knockin' around. We fed'em corn, oats, hay, and sweet feed—cane syrup mixed in with the corn and oats.

LON DOVER: Sometimes horses would founder. If you got'em hot working'em and they'd get to the water and drink too much and they'd water-founder. You have to watch horses awful close on that. It'd kill'em if you didn't do something.

A horse is greedy—he'll just eat anything. One time a man's horse ate

some cane hay, gave him colic. That cane seed gave him the colic and he liked t'died—we sat up with him all night. That horse swelled up like he'd bust. He just lay there and he'd grunt, and he'd roll.

They also had bots—like a grub worm. A horse is bad to get 'em, but a mule hardly ever has 'em. They lay their eggs inside the horse and they hatch and grow in there. They get so many in there and after they get grown, they'll take hold of that horse an' kill 'em. A man told me that I should take a pint of syrup and get me some pulverized sage and mix it with that syrup to make a quart bottle full. Then pour it down the horse and it makes them grubs turn loose down in where the food goes. He claimed the sage would kill the grubs when they turn loose of the flesh and eat the syrup.

Now horses and mules'll get milksick, and it'll kill 'em just like it will cattle.

KENNY RUNION: You take a horse that's got distemper—I'll tell you what'll cure him up real good. You get a peck bucket and pour some hot tar in there. Put a hornet's nest in first and put the tar over it. Let it bleed a few minutes and when it quits, hold it right up against that horse's nose. Just put his nose down in the bucket.

Now there's one thing I don't reckon can be cured—that's the bots. They get right here in a horse's throat and eat through. If there's a remedy, I ain't never heard of it.

ESCO PITTS: A horse, especially, would take colic. Some wouldn't but others would. That's a disease of gas—just like if you have gas on your stomach. It'd bloat 'em up and you had to drench 'em. There was one remedy we used in those days that I don't see anymore; that was Japanese oil. Of course, if you didn't use anything, they'd get over it after a while, but they'd be down a'rollin' and be sick two-three days. I don't know just how they got it—maybe they just ate a little too much of something. Sometimes they'd just take it and you wouldn't know what caused it.

BUCK CARVER: Horses got sick ever' now and then. An' they had a heck of a lot of different diseases. They'd have lampers, bots, kidney colic. Now old man George Grist had a Virginia mare, called her Daisy, a real good old mare, and you could feed her one more ear of corn than she was used to, and she'd just almost die with that kidney colic. Old man Zack Dillard, no tellin' how many times he came over there. Now he'd take hot water and soap and a big old hose, and insert that hose in th' rectum and pour her full of that soapy water. Then he got'er up as soon as he could, and keep'er walking.

Now them lampers—the gums would go out underneath their teeth till

they couldn't bite th' corn off of the cob. You'd have t'shell it. Well, y'take a good clean pocketknife and open their mouth with a hammer handle or something so they couldn't shut down on you—it usually took two people t'do that—and cut the gums. They'd split 'em toward the teeth, y'know, and y'wasn't supposed t'go past the ridges in their mouth called bars, or they'd bleed t'death. They'd have t'do it ever' year or two, or maybe two or three times a year. I don't know what caused it—maybe too much blood up in their heads caused their gums t'swell. I've seen 'em level with their upper teeth. They couldn't shell the corn an' couldn't hardly chew—an' they'd just swallow it whole an' get pretty durn poor if you leave them gums that way. Them whole grains act as a filler unless you crack 'em.

Then there's another thing they call stringhalted. It was actually a strained tendon'r'a nerve and caused them t'limp or walk at an uneven gait.

A mule is a cross between a male donkey (jack) and a female horse.

LON DOVER: I always loved my work mules. You could plow the best with 'em, and they work real good. Some of 'em's nice, but some of them's mean. They'll kick. I had one that when you opened the door to the stall, she'd kick the facing off the door. If you wasn't watching, she'd get you. But once you got the bridle on her, she wouldn't kick. You could handle her anyway you wanted to. One day, [my son came out to the stall to get her] and she kicked at the door facing, and he dodged her and got a pitchfork and got her right in the hams, and she just bowed up and never did kick no more. That broke her.

I kept mine shod all the time, and that made 'em rougher. If they'd a'hit you, it'd a'killed you, but most of the time they're gentle.

ESCO PITTS: Of course we had t'keep mules at home. We didn't let them get out—put 'em in the pasture at home. They didn't run out with the cattle. We usually had a use for them—plow the crops in the spring and during the summer.

Just had t'feed them the year round. In those days and times, people pulled the fodder off their corn and cut the tops. That's about all the roughage we had to feed the mules. We didn't have any meadows for hay; sometime we had to go down in the valley where they had some meadows, and buy some hay. Most of the time though, we fed 'em on the tops and fodder off the corn. Of course, we fed 'em corn for grain. Sometime we'd grow some oats and a little rye. We generally saved rye in th'fall of th'year, in September, in our cornfield, and that was pretty good pasture during the winter. Rye, you know, is hardy and the freeze wouldn't kill it out—it stayed green. But mostly we fed the mules corn.



PLATE 54 A jack which belongs to Frank Rickman. A jack and a mare horse produce a mule, which is sterile.

BEULAH PERRY: My father had some mules, no horses. In th'mornin' he'd curry those mules and then take a great big brush and brush'em good. He did that at least once a day.

Th'mules used th'pasture too when they weren't working, but not as much as the cows. We had t'feed them at least twice a day heavy, because they worked so hard. My father grew wheat and oats for the mules. And sometimes he'd feed that straw to the mules. If they wouldn't eat it too well, my father would make a little salt water to sprinkle over that dry straw, and they would like that.

One thing that stands out in my mind—mules had what they used to call colic. It was from over-eating or something, and they would get sick and the veterinarian or some of the older men that knew how to do it would make up a medicine and put it in a long-necked quart bottle, and one person would hold th'mule and th'other would put that bottle in his mouth till he drank all that medicine. It would look like it was doing'em so bad, but it wasn't—it was for their good.

Some of our contacts preferred keeping and working horses, others would rather have mules. They told us some of their reasons.

JESS RICKMAN: It takes a lot more caring for a horse than for a mule. The mule you can do most any way, and they'll get by. A horse requires a good bit of doctoring, but they've got a much stronger brain than a mule has, because you can teach 'em to do different things and tricks that you couldn't teach a mule. A horse is more likely to have kidney trouble than the mule is. My father'd drench 'em with spirits of nitre (ethyl nitrite spirit or spirit of nitrous ether) till they got straightened out with th' kidney trouble.

You can just rough a mule through on corn and a mule won't hardly eat enough to hurt him, but a horse will—they'll founder every time they get into the feed.

LON DOVER: Now horses, you have to take better care of them than you do a work mule. Everybody kept mules, and they didn't have many horses—mules worked as good again as horses. I never could get horses to work.

A horse'd go too fast for me—they'd almost trot sometime. You couldn't turn horses and mules out, you had to have a pasture for them. They'd be the first thing in people's fields. A mule is as hard again to keep in a pasture as a horse—you had to have a good fence t'keep a mule in. They used horses mainly for pulling, buggies and riding. Now mules you could work good, but they wasn't fit t'ride hardly.

They had t'feed horses'n'mules till work time was done. Then they'd put 'em in a pasture and let 'em eat grass for a living. But you did have t'feed 'em in the winter if there wasn't much grass. Fed 'em corn and fodder, same thing as the cows.

ESCO PITTS: A mule was usually easier broke than a horse, and he was just a little easier to control, unless you had a horse of some aging and well-broken. They're very much alike, only a mule is stubborn. You couldn't make him do what you can make a horse do after he's well-trained. They'll work about the same. I believe a horse has got more sense than a mule. We didn't have any of those big work horses—just country-grown mules and horses—not the big, heavy draft type. We didn't need 'em, because our farm just wasn't big enough to justify keeping them. They're big eaters, you know. Ours were small and didn't eat so much, but they'd do all the work we needed.

HOGS

KENNY RUNION: [They used to put bells on hogs.] I mean, good, big bells. I had a hog that learned your voice. He'd come from just as far as he could hear you. Some of 'em would blow [through] a gun barrel and them hogs was just all over each other a'coming.

BERTHA DOCKINS: Back when my daddy raised hogs—and he had wild hogs all over the mountains—he'd go every week and feed them hogs corn. He carried it over his shoulder. He'd shell it and take a big bunch of corn—and if it was real bad weather, snowing, he'd go up twice a week. He always had four or five brood sows; he had over a hundred up in th'mountains when he died. He sold a lot of hogs—he didn't just grow them to eat. Now they'd put up hogs t'fatten nearly all summer. They'd put up a shoat in th'pen—'bout a hundred pounds—then kill'im in November.

Daddy'd pack his meat in a big old box, salt all over it, and let it stay there about two months, and he'd take it out then and wash it and hang it. Let it drip from November to about March, and he'd wash it and let it dry, and put it in any kind of a cotton sack, tie it up real good, and most of the time, just hang it back up.

He generally kept several male hogs. You see, hogs don't stay all in one flock. Maybe over here on this mountain, they'll be one bunch in a hollow; then maybe way over yonder a mile or two miles will be another bunch. They stray off a lot. They're worse than cattle. My daddy castrated most of the male hogs when they were little, before they got out of the bed. I believe it's six weeks when they turn them out of th'bed.

[Hogs have a lot of enemies] sometimes if they haven't got a real mean old boar hog, and something will get a'hold of th'pigs. And the mother has t'be tough, too. Wildcats, wolves, and th'fox are bad t'get little pigs. If there's little pigs out where people can't look after'em, foxes'll eat them pigs up—maybe one a day till it gets'em all.

The biggest disease bothering hogs was the hog cholera—they still have it now. They used t'do away with the ones that got it, but most of them died.

PLATE 55 Young hogs in Glen Dockins' hog lot.



BEULAH PERRY: Little baby pigs were always my favorite. My father'd keep four-five hogs—one to raise little pigs from, then two or three he'd kill each year for meat. He'd keep maybe two or three pigs, depending on how many hogs he had on hand and sell th'rest.

My daddy kept one male hog if it was a good breed—he'd always pick one of a good stock to sire the pigs. If he didn't get a real good one from th'batch of pigs, he'd buy one rather than keep one of his own.

The hogs we fed slop from th'kitchen, and shorts that come from th'wheat when it was made into meal. We kept a big slop can in th'kitchen all the time.

We had a hog lot, with a shed with a wooden floor, and every once in a while, my father would get in and clean that out, and in the wintertime, he'd put straw or leaves in there. You've got to take good care of your animals.

There were a few hog diseases. Th'hogs used to get worms, and my father would go to the veterinary who'd tell him what to do but I don't remember what that was. And back in those days, there was a lot of cholera got into the hogs.

LON DOVER: Hogs roamed the mountains, where there's all kinds of mast-chestnuts. The hogs'd get just as fat on them as they could be—fatter than they would on corn. And you could bring'em in an' kill'em right off the mast. But they claimed the blight killed off all the chestnuts.

If a family was large, they'd need t'kill six or eight hogs a year. They'd have maybe half a dozen sows, and sell some of the pigs. They'd have them all sizes and ages, and they'd keep enough so they could have a large hog t'kill, and the other'uns taking their place. Nearly everybody kept a male hog. They'd run outside, and not cost much t'keep.

Ever'body had their hogs in the woods, and ever' man had a different mark [which was registered]. You'd know your hog by your mark. They'd notch the ear. Me and my daddy had the same mark—crop and split in the left ear, and a split in the right. You did that when they were little. The sow would make a big bed for delivering her pigs, and you had t'get'em [and mark them] when they were little.

People had s'many hogs in th'woods they'd go ever'day and look after'em, and if a sow was gonna come in, they'd check on her pretty close, and people generally knew where they slept. They stayed out in the woods all the time. They was raised in the woods and didn't know nothin' else. You'd have to take corn up to feed'em in the wintertime. They'd root under that snow and leaves and get acorns under there.

Hogs was bad to get cholera—that kills'em. There's something used t'come into Towns County, called it black plague and that killed'em. That

killed nearly ever' hog in them mountains. The hogs would die in the branch, and you couldn't drink the water. It worked different from cholera.

JESS RICKMAN: Hogs were smaller and had a nose about three times as long as the tame ones now—we called 'em jug drinkers. They had the Russian type hogs. They lived off of acorns, chestnuts, and pine roots. They could uproot a small pine just rooting around it—they like those tender roots.

ESCO PITTS: The hogs ran out with the cows, y'know. In my young days, the chestnuts were in the woods—you could just rake 'em up by the handfuls and hogs would get fat on them. It wasn't firm meat; it was too flabby. We didn't like it because it didn't make much grease, and it was flabby and spongy. They'd get fat off chestnuts but all you had to do was take 'em off of that and bring 'em in and feed 'em about six weeks on corn and then you got good meat. It tastes good then.

When we wanted to put pork up in the fall of the year, we put the hogs up in a pen and fattened 'em on corn and just anything. If we had excess Irish potatoes, we'd cook them and feed them those and take corn to the mill and grind it and make slop, and fatten 'em on that—on corn and slop and scraps from the table.

We generally kept two or three brood sows and we'd have a dozen or two hogs, maybe two dozen small shoats. We had plenty of hogs any time we needed to kill 'em, and sometimes we'd sell one, maybe to pay the taxes or something. Usually one or two males was all we ever needed [for breeding]. We'd pick the best one or two of the bunch, and alter the rest of them when they come.

A brood sow was good for about five years and then you could put her up and fatten her. Then you'd raise the young ones for breeding. There's always younger ones coming on. Sows have piglets twice a year. I've forgot the gestation period, but anyhow they'd have 'em twice a year, usually in the spring and sometime in the fall. They would generally run out till snow fell on the ground, and I've known Daddy to go in the woods and find his sow that he was looking to bring pigs, and she'd have her brush pile built, great big brush pile full of leaves and everything, and you'd find her back in there under the snow with her baby pigs. He'd let the sow alone and feed her till the pigs got big enough to follow her and then he'd turn her in home and in a lot, and take care of her until the little pigs got pretty good size.

[The mother was mean when she had babies]; she'd bite you. Usually she didn't want you around. But she knew my daddy, and he'd feed her, and he could do more with her than any of us kids. But he couldn't get a hold of one of them pigs just then. He'd lead her home by taking a bucket

of slop and towing her home [when the piglets were big enough to follow her].

CATTLE

LON DOVER: They didn't have any other kinds of cattle, only the milk stock. They'd raise their own work cattle (oxen), raise them from the cow. People'd pay the fee for a bull—it'd be a couple of dollars at the most.

People would keep three or four milk cows—the bigger th'family generally the more cattle they'd keep. But they wasn't able to afford too many—and you could buy a good cow for thirty dollars. People would raise calves, sell the heifers or keep them for milk cows. Th'males they'd sell or eat, or keep for breeding purposes.

We'd raise corn for grain and fodder. That's all cattle had t'eat [in the winter]. And the people had the poorest cattle you've ever seen—they didn't raise hay like they do now, or have big pastures for'em to run in.

I've heard of milk cows living to fifteen years old, still give milk, but the milk ain't good—they generally raised calves when they got older. One time, my daddy bought one—I believe he gave \$15.00 for it. Now she must have been eighteen years old. Didn't have no teeth. They just swallow their feed; then of a night, when they lay down, they chew their cud.

You knew a cow was sick if she quit chewing her cud. And if you doctored her and she got better, that'd be th'first thing she'd do. Cattle'd get poison ivy in the spring—they'd be poor and eat ever'thing green, and sometimes they'd get that poison ivy. It wasn't so bad; it'd make'em sick t'their stomach, and they'd stagger just like a drunk man, and you'd give'em something and they'd throw it up. We generally use coffee and raw eggs t'make'em throw up the poison ivy. And there's an old thunder berry that has seed on it, and if they get that, it'll kill'em nearly every time.

Whenever cows had the hollow head, their nose generally would drip and run. The disease would eat the soft inside out of the horn, and the horn would feel like a shell. I reckon it hurt. I've sawed their horns off—when-ever they had hollow head. It'd heal up if you sawed the horns-off.

ETHEL CORN: Steers have a forked hoof. The way they'd shoe a steer—their shoe was in two pieces—they'd be a piece put on the front to give'em a better hold in pulling. They were wide but in two pieces.

Sometimes, it would maybe be a year or more before they'd wear their shoes out and they'd have to be re-shoed. If you don't keep shoes on'em when you're workin' em, it splits their hoofs and makes their feet tender and they can't pull as much as they can with shoes on. It's all right not to have shoes on'em when they're not being worked.



PLATE 56 Glen Dockins' cattle. Notice the bell on the cow on the right and the two steers in the background.

Now, there were a few horses worked that was never shod, but they was so mean they'd kick and they was afraid for you to mess with their feet.

ESCO PITTS: We had as high as three cows one time, but usually two was about what we had because we didn't want 'em to come fresh at the same time, and we'd have milk all the time. There were eleven of us—we were raised on bread and milk and butter and syrup and meat.

People didn't have good grass pastures then like they do now. We had to wait until way late in the spring before we had any grass, and so we had to feed the cows. We fed them quite a bit—nubbins and fodder and shucks and tops. Nubbins are small ears of corn, too small to make seed or to go to meal. We just sorted out the small ones that the cows could chew and sometimes they would be a little too big and we'd chop 'em up with the hatchet, put a little cotton meal on 'em and sometimes my daddy would go down in the cotton country and bring back a wagon bed full of cotton seed hulls. A cow would give more milk off of cotton seed—just the whole seed. If we didn't get the cotton seed, then we'd get the cotton meal.

It would take about three weeks to go down to the cotton country with a yoke of oxen and he generally took a load of apples and cabbage and

produce that we had grown on the farm and took it down there and swapped it for what we needed.

Oxen were the same [kind of cattle] and we worked them. Had t'give'em grain when you worked'em—corn and oats.

You could work a steer a long time before he got too old. Generally, my daddy would trade with somebody for a young yoke. Oxen could plow, bring in our wood, bring in corn. When we wanted t'haul heavy loads, we'd put the oxen to the two-ox wagon.

People made beef out of oxen. They weren't tough. An old animal after you fatten it, is tenderer than a young one.

The veterinarians will laugh at a fella for saying a cow has hollow horn, but usually, the cows would get droopy and they'd get to where they wouldn't eat much and they'd go to fallin' off. We'd take and cut their horns off and put disinfectant on there to keep flies from bothering them. They'll heal up and get all right so we thought that was what was the matter.

Sometimes they'd get hidebound and you had t'take and loosen their hide by hand—on the spine. Just get a'hold of the hide and lift it up, go all along and loosen it up. I've seen my dad do that. I wouldn't know what causes hidebound. The cows usually get in too thin a condition, not enough nutrition, and they get poor and they don't have enough circulation and enough fat on their bones, and the hide gets bound down in there and it gets droopy, but that wasn't very often. It did happen though.

Now and then the cows would eat this mountain laurel and sometimes they'd get poisoned. We'd feed'em strong coffee, pour strong coffee and lard down'im and that'd generally kill that poison. You'd have to give him about a quart of that. We'd mix it while it was hot and melt the lard, and pour it down'em. You'd have to get the cow right by the under jaw and stick their head straight up, and get a'hold of their tongue and just pour it down'em. I've drenched many a cow by myself.

BERTHA DOCKINS: They always had a stable for the cattle. An' they'd feed'em good an' turn'em out on nice days. That's during the cold weather. If th'milk cows didn't come in, they'd go and get'em. The dry cattle, weaned calves, they'd stay in th'mountains in th'warm weather. Th'people would go maybe once a week to see how they were and take salt to'em. They had bells—if they had four or five cattle, one of'em would have a bell. If it was a big bunch, maybe fifteen or twenty, they'd have two, three bells. And they could hear the bells when they wanted t'find them.

[Cows had notches in their ears].—My daddy's notch was a split on th'right and an underbit on th'left. Everybody had a mark, y'know, and they registered'em at th'courthouse. If anybody was t'get a'hold of a stray cow, they'd know who it belonged to. My daddy's cattle wasn't a special

breed, most of 'em was mixed. Back in old times they mixed 'em—not like they are now. He usually had some Jersey in his milk cows, so they'd make good yellow butter.

My daddy usually always kept a bull with his milk cows. And when he put 'em out in th'woods, he turned th'bull out with the heifers—put 'em in th'woods in th'spring. Mostly, the cows had their calves in th'spring—nearly always. You had t'go out in th'woods to get the cows or they'd have their calves in the woods. My daddy kept kind of a record of it, and he always knew about th'time they was gonna bring their calves. So he'd go out and drive 'em in, and put 'em in the pasture where he could look after 'em.

Most of th'time, my daddy would keep the calves and get some growth on them, then sell them. He'd let 'em grow till they got up two, three years old, then he'd sell 'em. In th'fall, he'd drive them all in, and pick th'ones he was gonna keep. The fattest ones he'd sell at th'market for meat. He walked 'em to th'market at Tallulah Falls.

He used t'kill some of them, if he took a notion, in the fall of th'year. He'd say, "Well, I'm gonna have me a good beef this winter." And he'd put it up and he'd feed it corn twice a day for two, three months; then he'd kill it. He said that corn made the meat sweet. They cured it and wrapped it in this cheesecloth, hung it in the smokehouse. They call it dried meat, jerky out in the West. We ate what we could fresh, and dried th'rest.

My daddy always kept a pair of oxen—we used t'ride in the wagons. Oxen are th'same as beef cattle. They castrate 'em and make steers out of 'em—th'bulls, you know. And then they learn 'em to work. A yoke of oxen have t'be three or four years old before they begin training them. Then they drive 'em—put that yoke on and let them go with it on for a while. Next thing, they'll put a little log to 'em, just a little light one till they get 'em used t'pulling; then they'll put a bigger log; then they'll put 'em to th'wagon. It takes a while t'get 'em trained. They live maybe sixteen, seventeen years. My daddy always kept a young yoke—he'd be training them while he was workin' th'older ones. When the younger ones got up t'where he could work 'em, he'd turn th'old ones out. They'd get out in th'woods and get fat and he'd sell them for beef.

ANNIE PERRY: When cattle get sick, they'll eat ivy sometimes. Now you folks know what ivy is. It grows on bushes. We have ivy, rhododendron, and laurel. Sometimes animals get t'where they don't want nothing t'eat but that. And then it makes 'em sick. And then t'get 'em over that, you get you some sweet milk, tablespoonful of soda (baking soda), and a little salt. Put it all in that pint of sweet milk, shake it up, pour it down 'em. He'll be sick then, y'know. Then they vomit and it makes 'em better.

BUCK CARVER: In the winter, most people's cattle was in a lot or a pasture somewhere close to th'house. Last time we ever let ours run out was the late twenties or 1930. And they was milksick up in that country somewhere. I remember one summer three or four people had got it. Their cattle had got it somewhere in the woods. Now a milkcow that's a'giving milk, it don't bother her a bit; it comes out of the milk. You can tell it—it's where the milk won't foam, and it looks like spots of grease on top of it. If the cow is dry, or a male animal eats it, it'll kill'em as dead as eternity. You can pour plenty of liquor to'em if y'got it t'waste. Sometimes whole families got that and nearly died. Milksick is something that's in the ground, and it's most usually found in deep, cold hollows, most usually on north ground.

CATS

LON DOVER: People had lots of cats. They'd keep the mice down—they wasn't really pets. People'd keep'em in the barn, and they'd get mice, but you still had to feed'em once of a morning.

JESS RICKMAN: When I was comin' up as a kid, everybody had a big cat-hole, a notch sawed out of the door, and the cats'ud go and come in an' out.

PLATE 57 A hound dog belonging to Carlton English.



DOGS

BEULAH PERRY: My father and mother's brother were big hunters—coon-hunting, possum-hunting, and rabbit dogs; and sometimes there'd be ten or twelve dogs at our house. The dogs had a big shed t'stay in—they didn't stay in the house. I was the one who had t'make bread for th'dogs t'eat—they didn't hunt much of their own food.

LON DOVER: You never see a dog now that's any 'count to tree coons or possums or anything. People used to train'em from a pup on up, train'em with older dogs. They were mainly hunting dogs, but a few people had pets. Had to feed'em good.

JESS RICKMAN: People used to keep more hunting dogs and stock dogs than they do now. They had what was called the old brindle cur, good to catch wild hogs with, and they had hounds. The old blue-speckled hound would do the trailin' and then they had a half bulldog and half cur to go catch and hold'em till you could tie'em.

ESCO PITTS: We just had one dog at a time. One was a snake dog, and he'd kill rattlesnakes. Ever so often, you'd hear him bay a rattlesnake and you could always tell whether it was a poisonous snake or one that wasn't poisonous by th'way he'd bark. He knew the difference. When I was a boy at home, our dog never did get snake-bit.



PLATE 58

PLATE 59



BANJOS AND DULCIMERS

Trying to trace the history of the banjo as a musical instrument is one of those tasks that can quickly make you want to tear your hair out. Though hundreds of articles have been written on the subject [a fine bibliography is available from Joe Hickerson at the Archive of Folk Song in the Library of Congress], many are contradictory and filled with speculation. On one fact, however, nearly all are in agreement: that America's favorite folk instrument was brought to this country from Africa and Jamaica by Negro slaves in the eighteenth century. Thomas Jefferson, for example, in his *Notes on Virginia* (1782) mentions the "banjar" as being the chief instrument of the American Negro.

How did it get to Africa? Pete Seeger speculates that the Arabs may have brought it to the African West Coast [*How To Play the Five String Banjo*, third edition, published by the author in Beacon, New York, 1961]. We know that instruments like it in the Near and Far East (the sitar and sarod, for example) have been common for nearly as long as records exist, and stringed instruments with skin heads and wooden shells are known to have existed nearly 4,500 years ago in Egypt ["The Five-String Banjo in North Carolina" by C. P. Heaton; *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, Volume 35, Number 1, March 1971, page 62]. What paths the instrument followed through these countries, however, is simply guesswork.

At any rate, the instrument did make it to this country, where it began to undergo (and survive) an amazing amount of experimentation and popularity, despite a popular white belief that all banjo players and fiddlers were certainly bound for Hell. "Thick as fiddlers in Hell" is an expression still used in our part of the mountains.

The first banjos to come to our coast "had two, three or four strings (of horsehair, grass or catgut) and a hide stretched across a gourd. Cats, possums, raccoons, sheep, snakes and other assorted creatures supplied the skins



PLATE 60



PLATE 61

for the early banjo heads" [Heaton, page 62]. An article by C. J. Hyne in the December 15, 1888, issue of the "Boys Own Paper" [reprinted in the March 1974 issue of *Mugwumps*] says, "With rapid strides it improved in form. First a wooden hoop, and then a metal one; first a rough skin for the drum, then the best parchment; first nails to hold it on, then neatly-made tension screws. At one time the strings were made of anything that came handy; now they are formed from the 'intestines of the agile cat.'" That was in 1888. Since then, the number of variations that have been tried that we *know* about would dwarf those of Hyne's experience.

Usually cited as the most important development in the history of the instrument itself was the addition of the shorter "chanter," "drone," "thumb," or fifth string. Here again, facts are hard to come by, but many historians credit Joel Walker Sweeney, a Virginian who was a professional blackface minstrel, with the addition sometime between 1830 and 1845. His original banjo is now in the possession of the Los Angeles County Museum. Arthur Woodward writes of Sweeney and the acquisition in the museum's Spring 1949 quarterly [Volume 7, Number 3, page 7]. The article says, in part: "In 1890, Mr. F. J. Henning, a teacher of music and a skilled banjo performer, learned of the existence of Joel Sweeney's original banjo . . . He entered into negotiations with the family and secured the old instrument . . . [It] is made of a dark, reddish colored hardwood. The head is of stained leather, fastened on with tacks. There are no strings. Scratched in the wood, still faintly visible, are the initials 'J.S.'" [One Sweeney banjo will be found documented in this chapter on pages 165-66].

Though all banjos prior to 1880 were fretless [Heaton, page 64], demand for fretted ones by minstrel banjoists at that time caused several manufacturers to put them on the market. Though their popularity lapsed in the early 1940s, players like Earl Scruggs brought them back, and today the five-string, fretted banjo (often with a plastic head) is again king.

Our interest in the banjo really began when a whole new group of students at our school began to learn to play it riding the crest of still another surge in its popularity. We knew almost nothing about it—not even where to begin to look for information. Now, two years later, we feel we've made a good beginning, and everything we read confirms that. In the Heaton article, for example, the author quotes Louise Rand Bascom, who, in 1909, described the North Carolina mountain banjo of that day for the April-June issue of *Journal of American Folklore*: "The banjo is home-made, and very cleverly fashioned, too, with its drum-head of cat's hide, its wooden parts of hickory (there are no frets)." As you read the following articles, you'll find that to still be true in some cases.

Heaton continues by quoting an article about Frank Proffitt that appeared in the October–November 1963 issue of *Sing Out*: “As a boy, I recall going along with Dad to the woods to get the timber for banjo-making. He selected a tree by its appearance and by sounding . . . hitting a tree with a hammer or axe broadsided to tell by the sound if it’s straight-grained. . . . As I watched him shaping the wood for a banjo, I learned to love the smell of the fresh shavings as they gathered on the floor of our cabin. . . . When the strings was put on and the pegs turned and the musical notes began to fill the cabin, I looked upon my father as the greatest man on earth for creating such a wonderful thing out of a piece of wood, a greasy skin, and some strings.” You’ll find many echoes of that here too. In fact, three of the banjo makers represented here are from Proffitt’s home county.

We found four major head styles, all of them represented in this chapter: the all-wood head; the all-hide head; the wood head with the hide center; and the commercial head held on with brackets. Likewise, hoop styles and neck styles have great variety. In fact, there is so much variety in banjo construction that it would seem as though *anything* goes as long as it “rings.” Stanley Hicks, for example, showed us a banjo his father made out of a cake box. It worked well.

What we’ve done is to pick out seven banjo makers that represent the major styles we located. Their own instruments are documented here, as well as old instruments they may have owned from which they perhaps borrowed patterns or ideas. It was, and is, fairly common, for example, for an instrument maker to adopt a neck style from one banjo, a hoop style from another, and a head style from yet another, and put them together with his own wrinkles and ideas to form an instrument that is uniquely his in the best Sweeney tradition of borrowing/inventing.

Then, to conclude the chapter, Robert Mize, a dulcimer maker of genuine skill (he’s made over seven hundred of them) describes his method of dulcimer making in detail.

And on top of all that, you’ll also find fine diagrams by Annette Sutherland, one of our student staff members, which depict two of the banjo styles and additional details of the Mize dulcimer.

It’s taken us a long time to put this material together, but we think it’s been worth it. We hope you will too.

BEW WITH RAY MCBRIDE

ERNEST FRANKLIN

Last February, we drove up into North Carolina to visit with Ernest Franklin who, we had been told, would be a good person to talk with about instruments. He came out onto his porch as we lurched up his single-track, rutted dirt driveway. The weather was cold, and misting rain.

His house is an old log cabin chinked with red clay that was later boarded over. It has a single fireplace and a porch that extends along two sides. Firewood is stacked out back. His two dogs looked us over and acted as if they wanted to bark or run up and jump on us but were either too old or tired to try. One of them slowly lifted himself to his feet and half-heartedly wagged his tail just to let us know he was there.

When we explained to Mr. Franklin why we had come and who had sent us, he grinned and waved us in. We followed him inside, greeted his

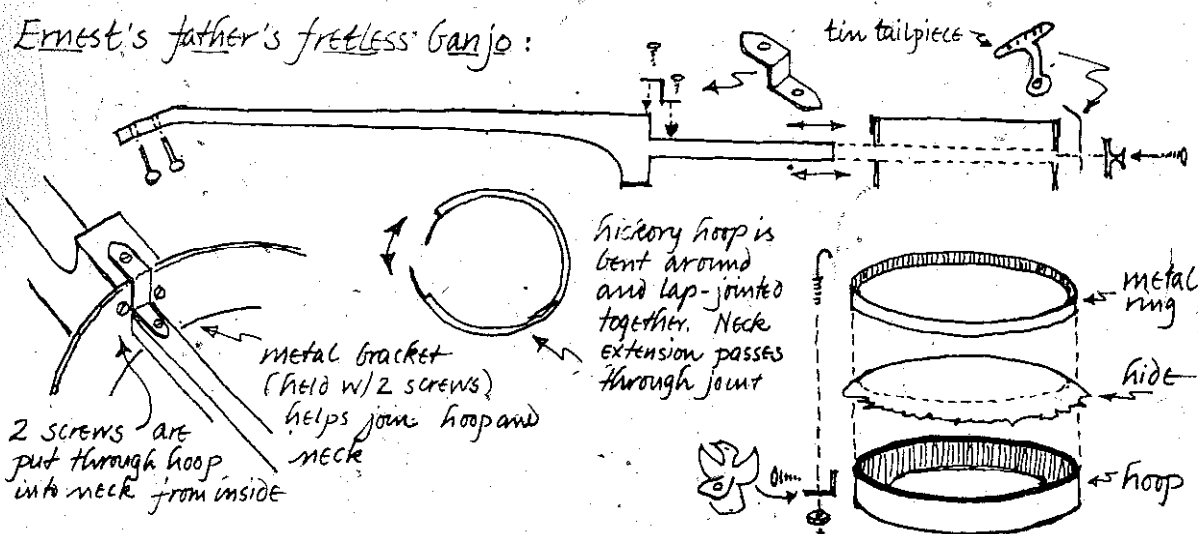


PLATE 62

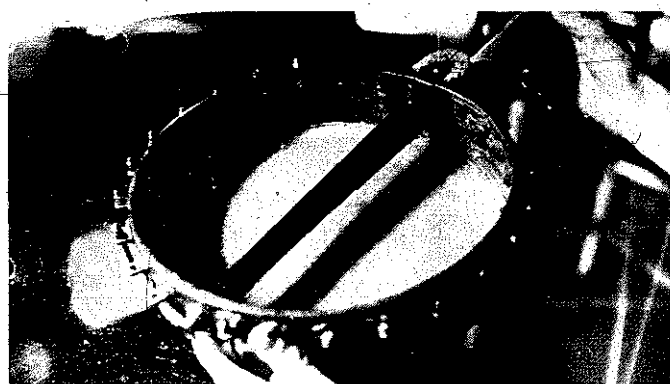


PLATE 63

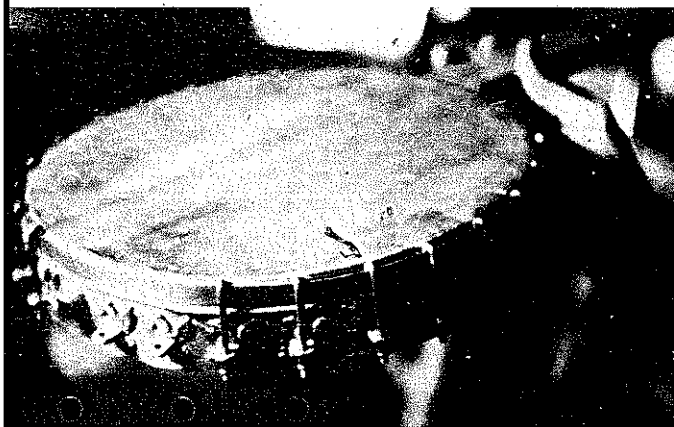


PLATE 64

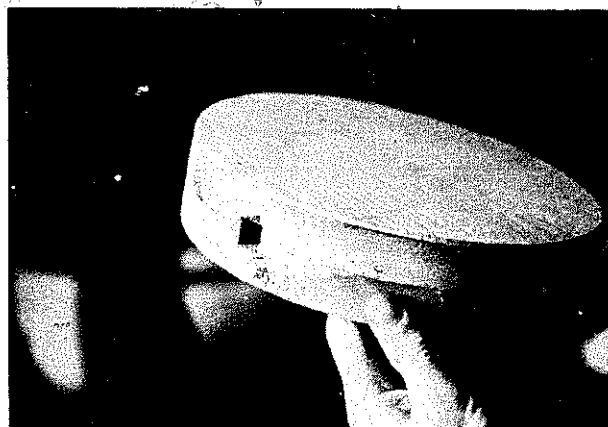


PLATE 65

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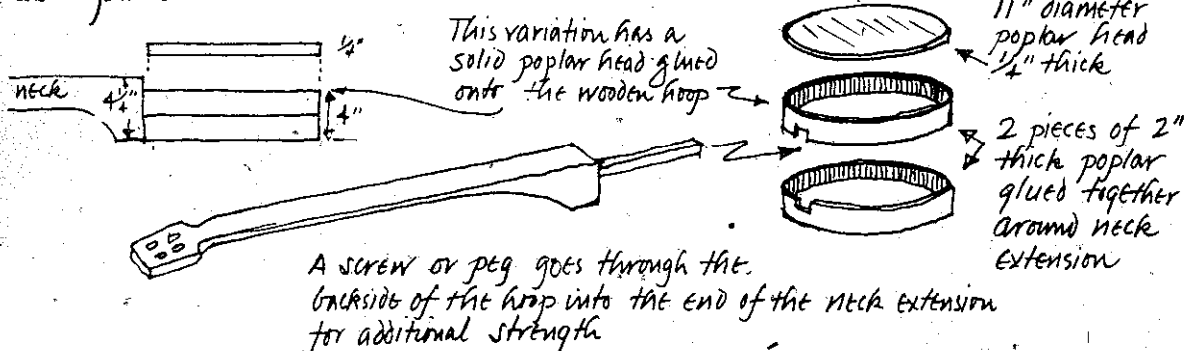


PLATE 67

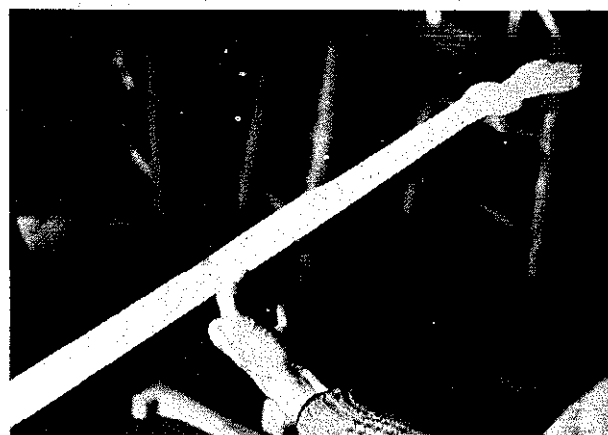
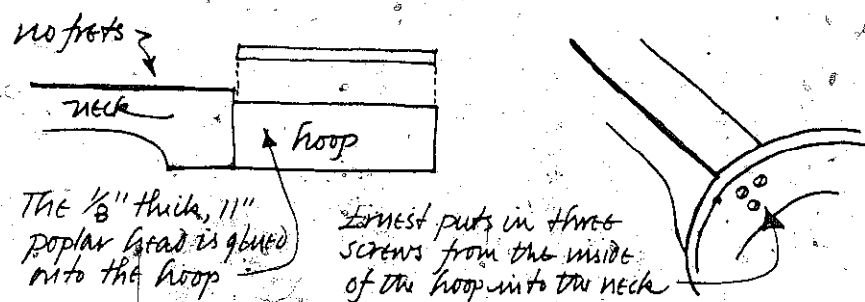


PLATE 68

PLATES 67-68 Two views of the poplar neck that Ernest Franklin is roughing out for a second type of banjo not based on his father's design. There is no tail extension—the neck will be mounted directly to the side of the hoop as shown in Plate 69. The wood is seasoned at least three years before being sawed out. Once sawed, it is worked down with a drawing knife, pocketknife, and wood rasp. Note the indentation in the side of the neck for the fifth-string peg.

PLATE 69



PLATES 70-72 In Plates 70 and 71, note squared place on hoop where neck will be attached. The hoop is cut out of a solid piece of well-seasoned poplar. He takes out the center with a brace and bit. In Plate 72, note how a slot is sawed into the neck at the base of the peg head, and the wooden finger bridge or nut set into the slot. Holes for the strings are sawed into the peg blocks first, and the pegs are whittled out around the holes.



PLATE 72



PLATE 71

dogs as we passed, and met his mother. He told us to sit down just anywhere. We settled down in a living room heated by the fireplace, lit by a kerosene lamp, and decorated with various family photographs, a picture of Jesus, an advertisement for Buck cigars, and the word "Love" in blue block letters above his bedroom door. His friendliness was overwhelming.

We asked him to tell us about his banjos. "Well, I'll tell you, the first one I ever made—you've seen your wooden cigar boxes? Well, I made one out of a square wooden cigar box. I didn't have no patterns or nothing to go by. I just thought that up myself."

Later, using a banjo his father had made as his pattern, he produced another one using a rasp, a pocketknife, a saw and a drawing knife. Instead of using a hide for the head, however, as his father had done, he glued on a wooden head. I had never heard of that being done before, but I later found out that some of the other *Foxfire* editors working on this chapter had found a second man nearby, M. C. Worley, who used wooden heads also.

"It's got a finer, mellower tone than that there," he said, pointing to my factory-made banjo. We asked him if a different type of wood would



change the sound. "Yeah, I imagine if a man had spruce pine it would sound better."

We asked questions for hours, sitting in his tiny living room and later walking over the farm. Slowly we began to realize what a story could be here for the future. His grandfather (whose old log house still stands on the property) had made fiddles, so he had tried that too. Many of the tools his grandfather and father had used (a shaving horse, for example) are stashed away in corners all over the farm. Every outbuilding holds its collection of family history.

Each time we asked a question about his instruments, he headed for the attic or bedroom and soon produced another battered banjo or tool or pattern or piece with which to answer us. We had the sinking feeling that if we only knew the right questions to ask, we could trigger a flood of stories hidden away behind the walls. Next time, perhaps.

When we asked him why he didn't use frets, he laughed. None of the old ones he had seen had had frets. Besides, "It's pretty tedious getting them in. You got to be spaced just accurately or it won't chord right. I tried one or two, but I never did get them right—they'd dischord—so I just made mine a plain neck."

None of the instruments he was making were finished, and he didn't have a completed one around either—as soon as he gets one finished, it's bought—but we finally got enough pieces stacked up on the living room floor to get the following information about his technique.

RANDY STARNES

Photographs by Randy and Don MacNeil.



PLATE 74

M. C. WORLEY

"Old people back in them times used to make everything they used. Make their chairs and tables and everything. Made everything they had to have. When I was a young man, I made the whole outfit for one of my cousins to go to housekeeping in. Bed, all the furniture. . ."

M. C. Worley also remembers that nearly every family had a banjo. Both his grandfather and father made them. His father used the skin of a housecat for his heads. "I'd rather skin a polecat than a housecat. They're the stinkiest things I've ever seen." Like Tedra Harmon, he'd take their hair off with ashes.

Many of the old banjos Mr. Worley remembered seeing had hoops bent out of single strips of hickory. The hickory splits were either put in a form

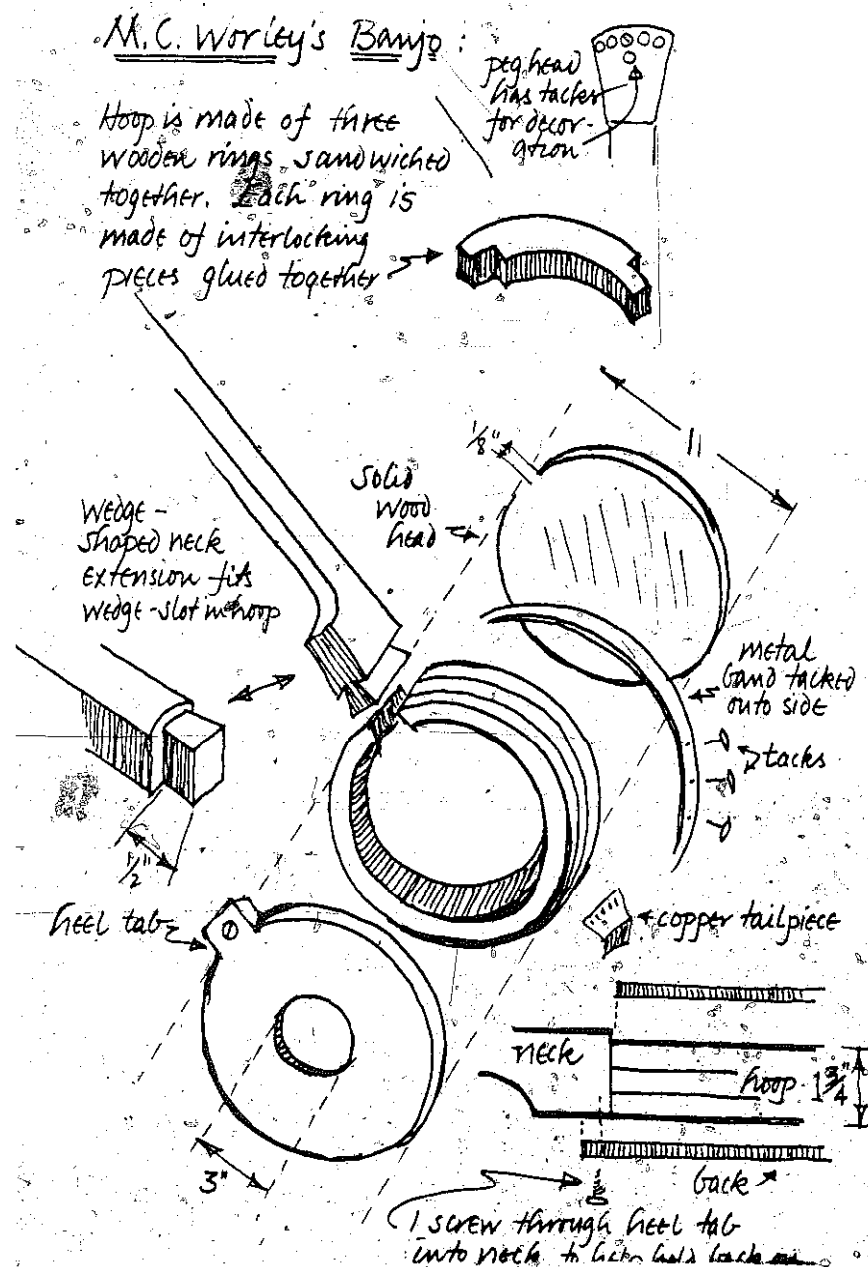


PLATE 75

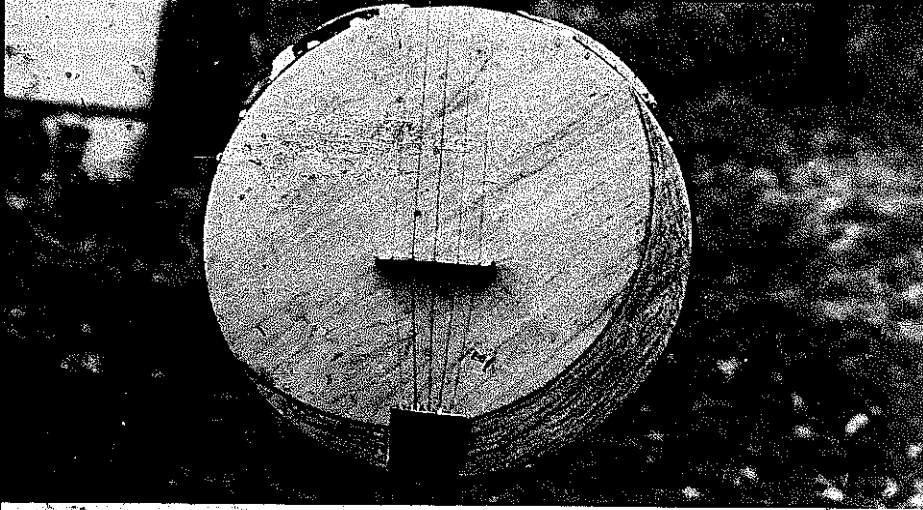


PLATE 76

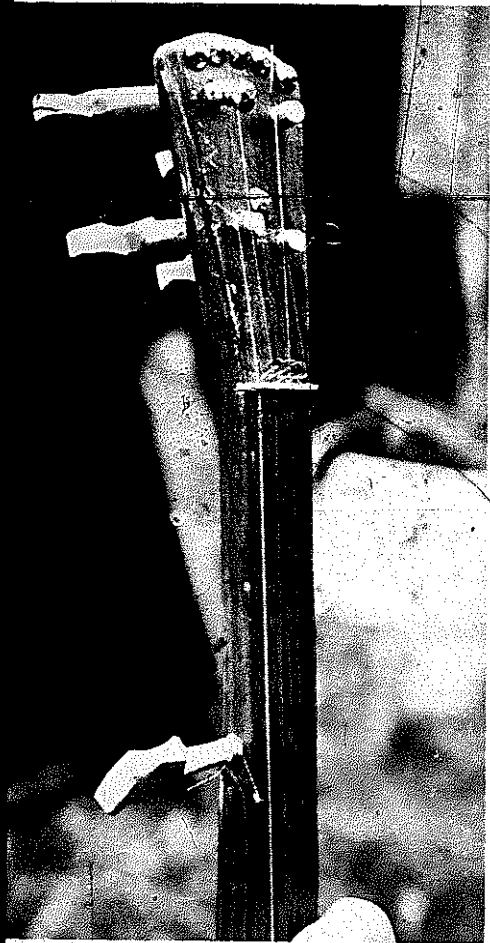


PLATE 77



PLATE 78



PLATE 79

green and left thirty days to dry and cure, or the cured wood was steamed and then bent into shape. The old necks he remembers had a long tail-piece that went all the way through the hoop and out the other side so the strings could wrap around it. There were no backs on the banjos, and the heads were hides that were either tacked on or held in place by a wooden ring that slipped down over them. He also remembers seeing wooden heads that had a four-inch circle of hide in their center.

His first banjo was a cigar box. "It rang pretty good, too." As he began to make them regularly, he moved away from the old patterns and began to experiment. He tried out an all-wood head, for example, and liked it.



PLATE



PLATE 81

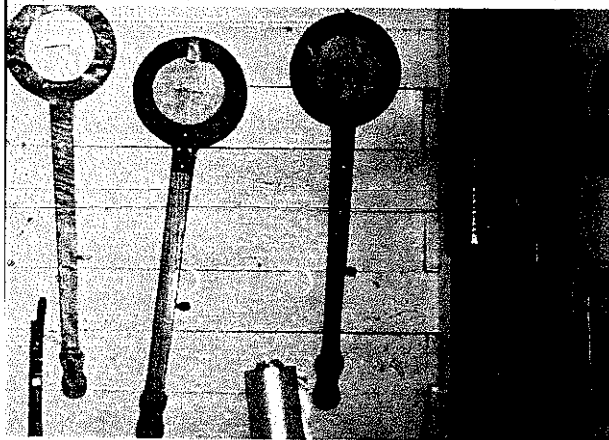


PLATE 82

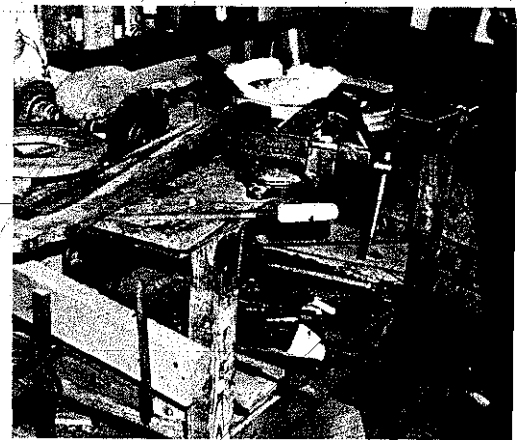


PLATE 83

Then he changed the hoop style and added the back even though he doesn't think the back helps the sound at all. He just likes the way it looks.

And he began to run into others who were experimenting too. One man he knows, for example, saws rings out of aluminum kettles and uses those for hoops. Now he tries something different on almost every instrument he makes. The one pictured in *Plates 75-77* for example, features a decorative metal band, tacks, and a green half moon colored on with a crayon. "I just put that on to be different. Just figured it out myself," he laughs.

He tries his hand at instruments other than banjos, too. He once made a guitar completely out of metal except for the wooden sides. And he fashions out fiddles, mandolins and dulcimers when he tires of banjo making.

Mr. Worley never goes to craft fairs, or makes an effort to advertise. He sells his instruments by word of mouth; and during tourist season, he sets them on the porch and, "people pass by and see them and come in." It's an unsteady living, but it keeps him occupied—and inventive.

DON MACNEIL

Photographs by Don and Jeff Williams.

TEDRA HARMON

Mike Clark, the Director of the Highlander Center near Knoxville, told us about Tedra Harmon, thinking we should meet him, and so we arranged to do just that. We got to his shop on time, and as we stepped up onto the porch, we could see him sitting inside, waiting for us to get there. It was rainy and cold outdoors, so he had his oil heater lit and had the shop warmed up for us. From the minute we stepped inside, we felt welcomed.

Inside his workshop, hung on the wall, he keeps the necessities for making his banjos: saw blades, rasps, squares, gunstock finish, etc. In one corner there is a fox hide stuck up next to a walnut gun rack that has deer hoofs for gun supports. The fox hide still has the hair and the head attached, and Tedra plans to make a cap out of it. He tanned it himself by turning the flesh side out and coating it with a thick paste of baking soda and water and leaving it for twenty-four hours.

In another corner of the room hang three of his banjos, including the first one he ever built. His workbench is stationed in the middle of the room, and on it, among the tools, were placed pieces of a banjo waiting for a skin head. Instead of completing it, he had left it disassembled so we could see and photograph the various pieces. Although he makes banjos only for a hobby, when we asked him how many he had sold, he replied, "It'd take a truck to haul them."

Teora Harmon's Banjo: *[for complete measurements and additional details, see plates 172, 173, 174.]

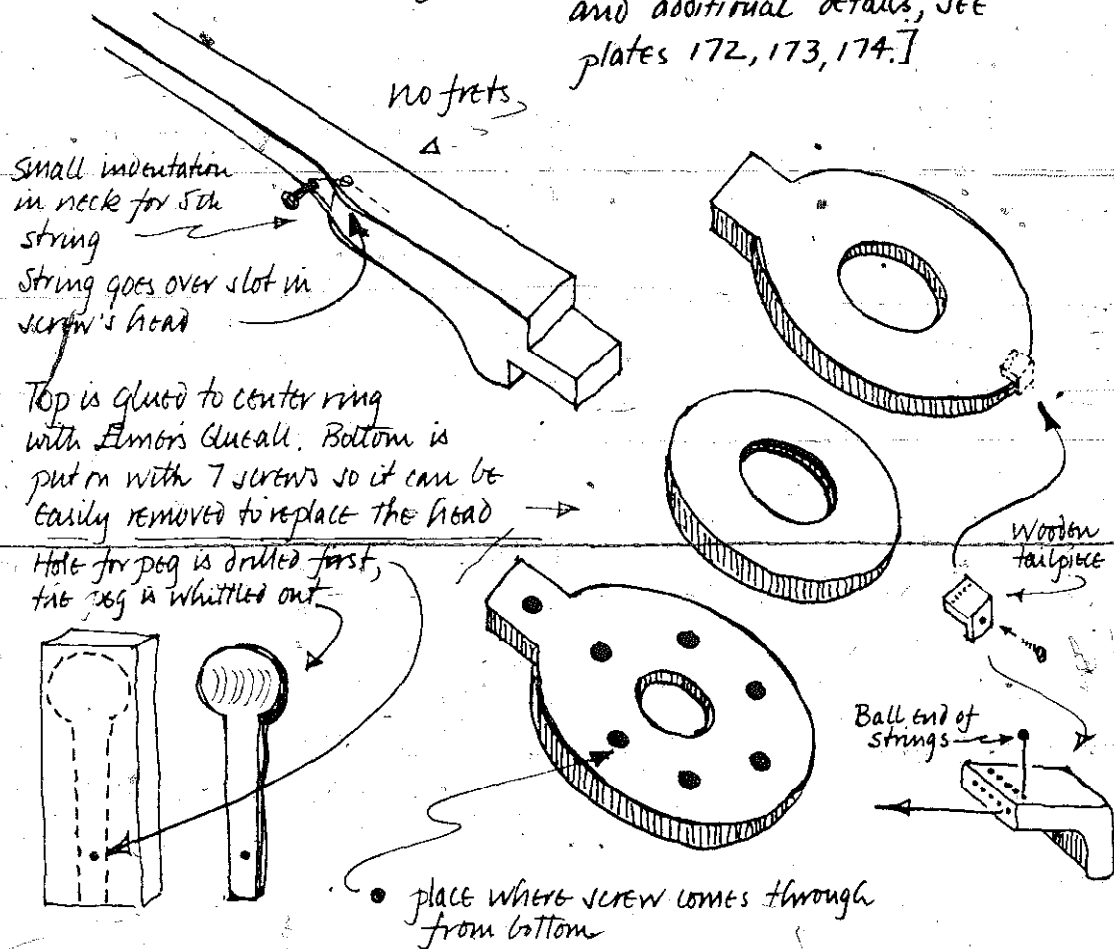


PLATE 84



PLATE 85

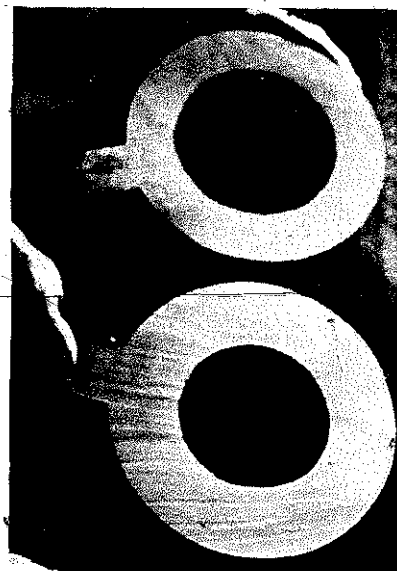
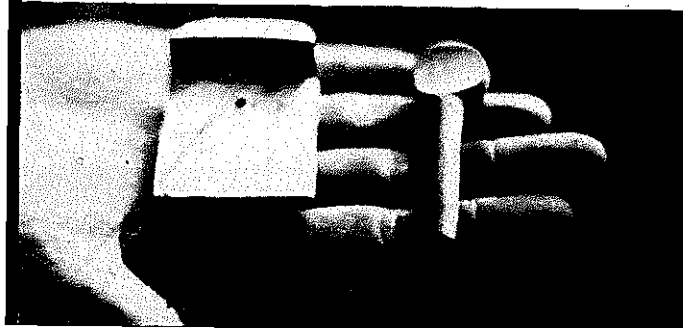


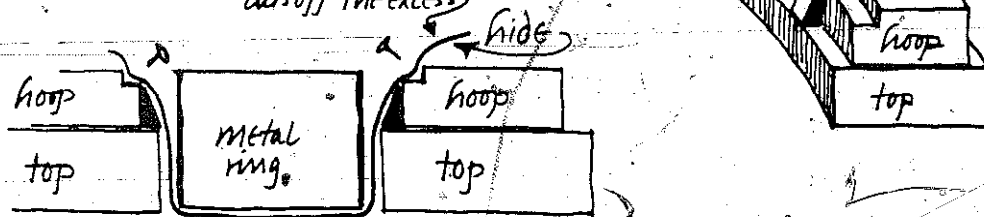
PLATE 86

PLATE 87

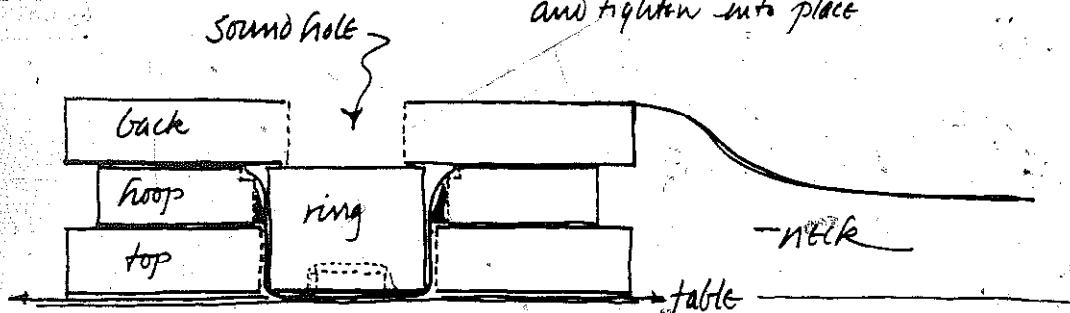


Setting the hide:

Tedra chisels out a notch in the hoop to tack the hide into, then cuts off the excess.



First the banjo, without the back, is turned top down on a counter. Then the damp hide is pushed down into the hole in the top and hoop, and pinched into place by the metal ring, and then tacked into place and trimmed. Then the back is screwed into place, and the banjo set aside to let the hide dry and tighten into place.



When hide is first put in, and is still wet, Tedra sets a small wooden disc under it (dotted line inside ring) to create just enough slack so that when the hide dries and tightens up, it won't split.

PLATE 88

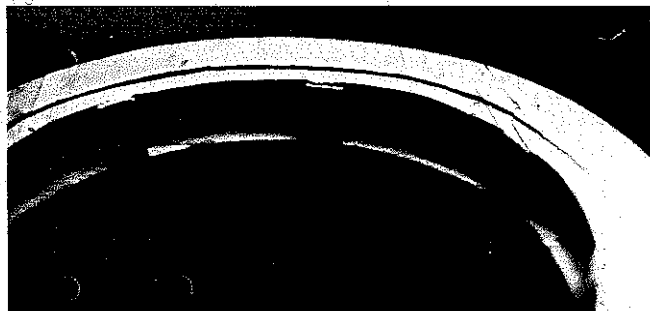


PLATE 89

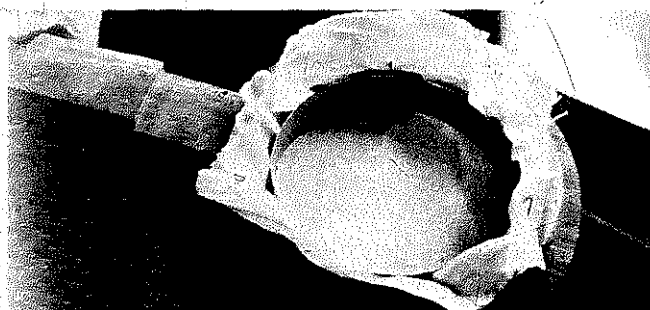


PLATE 90

Tedra was born in the mountains—he still lives on the same piece of land his parents settled on. He taught himself how to make and play banjos. He made his first one when he was thirteen, constructing it from poplar and putting it together with brass bolts. Since then, the hide has only been replaced once.

He's one of the few men we met who makes his instruments totally without commercial heads or pieces. He uses skin heads which he gets either from groundhogs and deer that hunters bring in, or from animals he has hunted himself. Once he was hunting and ran into a rattlesnake: "It was as close as from me to that stove there. I was sitting down there looking for squirrels when it went to singing. That racket was all over everywhere. I looked, and there that thing was coiled, his head up about that far [a foot]. Pointed right at my face. I leaned back and took my shotgun to him and took off his whole head. I was so nervous I could hardly get up and walk." ~~He now has the rattles from that snake mounted on the peg head of one of his banjos.~~

After getting a hide, he tans it himself. He sets the hide in a trough with the hair side up, and puts two to three inches of ashes over that. Then he pours water over it until it comes up over the top of the ashes. He leaves it for three days, and by then the hair will pull right off unless the weather has been too cold for the lye to work. In that case, it takes a little longer. He then tacks the skin up on a board to dry. The skin is tacked so that it is up off the board enabling air to get under it and allowing the skin to dry quickly and thoroughly.

When the skin is dry, and he is ready to put in into a banjo, he soaks it in salt water overnight, washes it in strong soap, and lets it soak for five minutes in warm water. He puts it in the banjo wet, and it tightens up as it dries. If the skin is put in too tightly, there is a danger that it will rip as it dries out. To keep this from happening, Tedra has invented a gauge, which is just a round disc of wood about a half-inch thick, and smaller than the diameter of the hole for the hide. The gauge is placed on the table, and then the banjo is placed, top down, so that the head hole is centered around the gauge. As he puts the hide in, this pushes up on the skin and creates the right amount of slack. It tightens up perfectly every time. He prefers deer or groundhog skins because they are the toughest. "You can whop a man over the head with one and still not bust the hide." Complete directions for Tedra's method for tanning hides can be found in the hide-tanning chapter.

Tedra sticks to the traditional mountain way of making his banjos. He makes the entire thing out of wood except for the head, strings, and screws. He likes hardwoods best because he thinks they create a better tone. He carves out his pegs with a pocketknife and then sands them smooth.

Often he makes them out of walnut. He makes his bridges, tailpieces, and nuts the same way, favoring walnut and curly maple.

He takes pride in his work, and enjoys not only making banjos, but also being helpful and generous in the true mountain fashion. He's the one, for example, who told us about Stanley Hicks. When we expressed an interest in meeting him, Tedra told us to come back in two days and he'd have an interview set up by then and take us there himself. He was good to his word—he set aside an entire morning to take us to Stanley's shop and then waited patiently until we had finished. That kind of generosity is rare nowadays.

He remembers his childhood days with more affection than many: "Back then was the peacefullest times they ever was. I wouldn't mind seeing it go back to that." He's hanging onto as much of it as he can—his banjos are proof of that.

RAY MCBRIDE

Photographs by Ray and Steve Smith.

STANLEY HICKS

Stanley Hicks could have kept us entertained for months—if any of us had had the time. That, of course, is the frustrating thing about the kind of work we're in. We seem to be always on the move.

Stanley and his family live on the top of a ridge far back in the mountains. From his little shop comes a stream of fine banjos and dulcimers, all the result of orders he gets from across the country, even though he never advertises his work through the many craft guilds and co-ops in the hills.

He learned how to make banjos from his father. Banjos, and lots of other things, for his father was one of those tremendously inventive mountain men we wish we had had the chance to meet. He made his own tools—many of which still hang in Stanley's shop: a plane with a reworked file for a blade, a croze with a piece of a saw blade for its cutting edge. And with those tools and his imagination he made wagon wheels, chairs, churns, barrels, tubs, tables, baskets, cabinets, and corner cupboards. A piece of steel with two slots cut into it and driven into a log is what he dressed his white oak splits with. Drawing the splits through the slots in the steel smoothed them and trimmed them to uniform widths. Stanley even helped his father hew out and build log cabins. He remembers it all.

His mother was industrious too. She made soap, for example. Her ash hopper was a hollow log set on end with a spout cut in the bottom to one

side and a screen strainer. She boiled hog innards and the lye from the hopper together in a pot to produce their soap.

And they made molasses, using a horse-drawn cane mill they had to crush the cane. "My grandma got her arm ground off in one. She was feeding cane and got it hung in there, and they didn't know nothing about running the mill backwards to get it out, and they cut her arm off. Took it off right there [between her elbow and wrist]. You know, that was rough!

"Dad used to make ladles and spoons and forks [out of wood] and pack them across the Beech [Mountain]—put him a sack full and put them on his back and walk 'em out. Be gone, maybe, till late of a night. And then we used to peel tan bark and haul it with a old yoke a' cattle t' Elk Park. We'd leave—take an old lantern—and it'd get cold sometimes, and we'd get in the wagon, and the old steers' tongues would hang out about a foot. And we'd take a load of tan bark out there, and then we'd camp that night and get back in the next night.

"Sometimes them steers would cough and sully up. And sometimes they'd lay down and turn in the yoke. One'd be turned that way and one this'n. They went and sully'd up on him once, and he went t' get some mud. He'd take and make up mud and pack it around their noses and then they'd come up. He wouldn't beat on them, but he'd pack this around 'em. I kind'a got ill at it myself, and while he was gone, I took and rook up leaves and rook it up right in here on their hind ends and took a match and lit it. And they come up, son! And they left with sled and all and run away with it plumb down to th' John Walsh's Mill!

"And Dad come back and wondered what happened, and I told him I guess they wanted water. . . .

"We dug up most of our ground. Right there's an eye hoe that I used

Stanley's father made the
tool below to smooth the inside
of his churns and barrels.

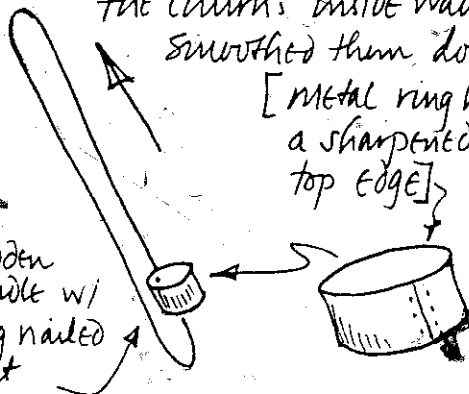
Putting the metal ring up against
the churn's inside walls

smoothed them down

PLATE 91

[metal ring has
a sharpened
top edge]

Wooden
handle w/
ring nailed
to it



when I was a kid. He'd get an old yoke a' cattle and get 'em broke, and times was so hard that when he got 'em broke, somebody'd buy 'em off him for fifty dollars. Forty or fifty for two. And then we'd have to go dig our ground up [by hand].

"And we went to the Beech and cut haw—it's just a little old bush—to get our shoes. Mother made our clothes. We gathered galax, peeled cherry, all that. Got about eighty cents a pound for the haw, and about three cents for the cherry. Get about thirty-five cents a day. They used it for medicine—sell it to one of these here that buy herbs. See, they wasn't no jobs until Whitings and Ritters [sawmills] come into this country in 1928—some-where's along there. I worked for them two years for a dollar a day. They cut timber. And the first work I done was on the WPA building roads. We had t'build 'em by hand. Take a drill, you know, and drilled 'em ourselves. Hammered [the drill] and turned it, you know. One turned it and another hammered it, and then we'd take a teaspoon on a little old handle and dip the dust out. Then they put the dynamite down in there.

"Time off, me and my brother was courting. Had to walk about twelve miles each way. One time we was going to see our girls up there, and they was a trail that went through a big bottom. And me and my brother was going through there and here come a buck sheep and hit just turned him a flip-flop. And he hollered and it hit me but I got ahold of it. And ever' time I turned it loose it'd knock us down. Big buck. We kept a'holding it—I'd hold it a while and he'd hold it a while. He'd go a piece and then I'd turn loose and run and time I got to him, he'd catch it and hold it.

"Well, we was there in the trail, and here come an old man through there, and he said, 'What are you boys doing?'

"And I said, 'Will you care to hold this sheep till we get out here and get our rope?' I said, 'We've run it till we've give out, and we left the rope out here catching it.'

"And he said, 'Yeah, I'd be glad to.'

"Well, me and my brother give him th'buck sheep, and then we went over the ridge into the river and then hid. And he turned it loose, and when he turned it loose it just turned him a somerset. And he'd look around one way, and then he'd grab it again. Well, directly he got him a rock and got it right between his legs like that and he beat that thing till snot come out its nose; and turned it loose, and boys, it went through th' field!

"And for a long time I see'd him—run on him, you know. And he'd look at me and look at me. One time he says, 'Ain't you th'feller that got me t'hold that damn sheep?'

"I said, 'I don't know. Why?'

"He said, 'By God I'd a'killed you boys,' he said, 'if I'd a'got ahold of you.' He said, 'I see'd what you done.'



PLATE 92

"I said, 'Well, a man *has* to do *something* to get out'a th'way.'"

"He said, 'I may whip you yet.'"

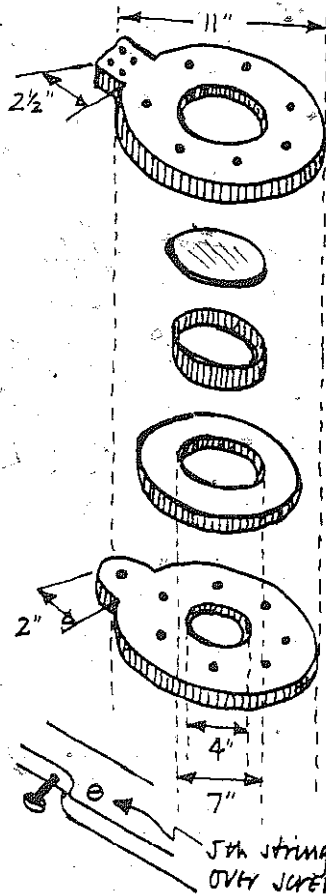
"And that's been five or six years. But we was courting. You'd have to walk for miles to see anything, and then, hell, you'd have to run your girls down attar y'got there t'*catch*'em. Hell, they'd run. Now, then, they're running the boys!

"But I helped my daddy make banjos. I don't know at the cats I got for him [for the hides]. But people got fond of'em. I had the best cat dog that could be got. I'd turn him loose and have my club tied right here [in a loop on his pants leg], and that dog would go to a house. I had him trained. He'd come to this house and run this cat away from there and take it to the woods and tree it. And I'd go climb the tree and motion about



PLATE 93

Stanley Hicks' Banjo



*[for complete measurements, see plates 172, 173.]

top has 11 1/4" brass screws (•) - no glue

6 1/2" commercial head

1 1/2" thick metal ring

9 1/2"-10" in diameter hoop 1" thick

11" in diameter x 1/2" thick back - 8 brass screws (•) - no glue

2 screws in tailpiece, also 2 screws with heads out for loop strings (+ 5 holes for ball-end strings)

5th string goes over screw head

PLATE 94



PLATE 95

PLATE 96



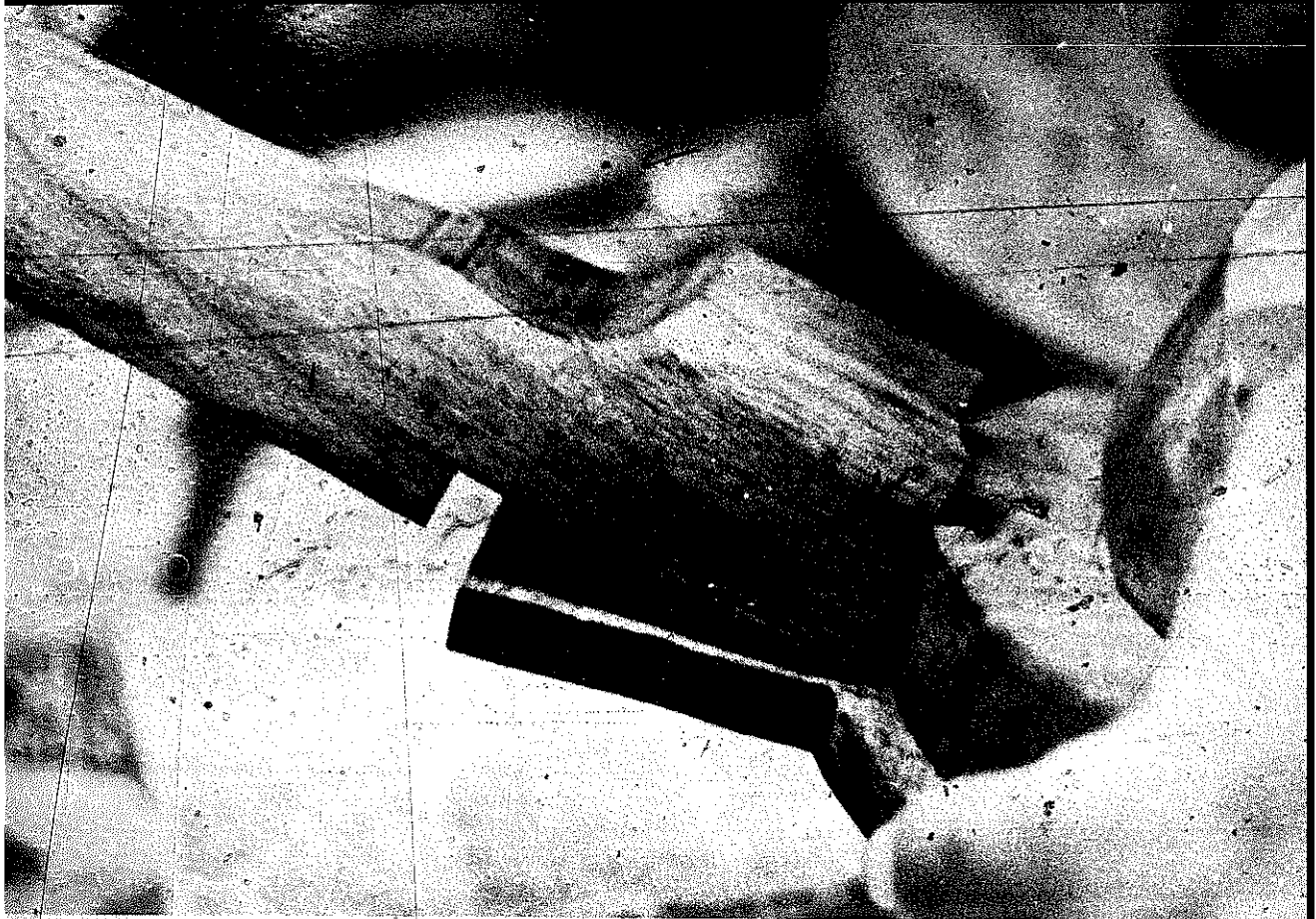
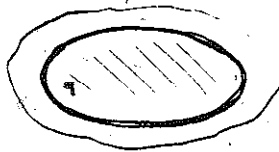


PLATE 97

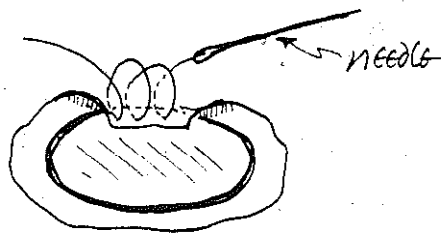
When Stanley uses a hide:

①



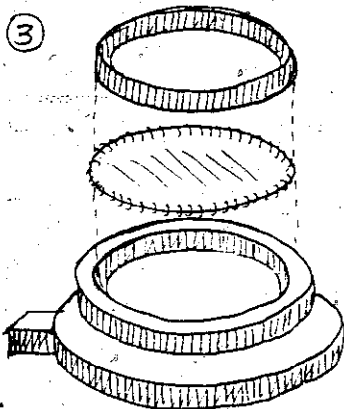
1. Hide is trimmed, and a wire ring the diameter of the 7" hoop hole is laid on top.

②



2. As in photos (white newspaper represents the hide), hide is sewn around wire. Thread is pulled tight, but stitches are big/loose.
3. Metal ring pushes damp hide into hole. 4. Back is clamped into place and hangs at side.

③



④

Note that wire ring fits just outside metal ring so that hide gets bound tightly - punched into place.

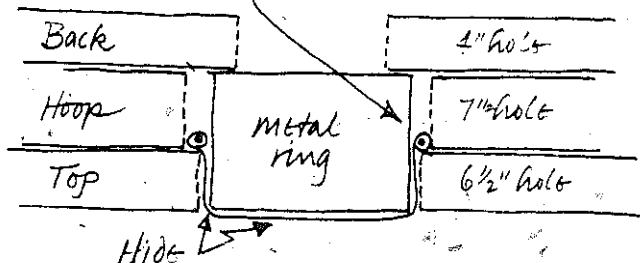


PLATE 98

two or three times to it, and if it jumped, he'd catch it and hold it till I got down. He wouldn't chew it up. I had him trained so he wouldn't *chew* it! And then I'd get down and finish it off. I'd take 'em in a sack and slip around through the woods so nobody wouldn't see me. I couldn't tell you how many I *have* took in.

"But they got fond of 'em. Back *then* they didn't care, you know. They'uz too many cats anyhow, and they didn't care much. But they just didn't want t'see you come t'th'house!

"I wouldn't get th'last cat a man had [laughing]. When I got down to one, I'd leave it fer'im!

"But I've been making banjos for about twenty years. That's my hobby. I ain't worked on a job in about six years. Kidneys went t'th'bad and I just do this for a hobby—and then it helps me out [financially]. And then I farm. My wife works every other day at the hospital.

"You have to be careful at this. I make my instruments to play. Sometimes I get a western one—that's what I call it if I get something in there and it doesn't work. Then you have to take it out. That's the western type. I've took out some. Before I'd send you one, I'd make 'em *all* out and make 'em right [if I had to]. That's what I make 'em for is to play 'em. You've got to check 'em out, and when you get a western one, you've got to change it!

"They was a boy here one time—young like feller—and said, 'What you get for them?'

"I said, 'Sixty dollars.' [Both Stanley and Tedra get about \$100.00 apiece now.]

"'God,' he says, 'I'm a'going home.' Said, 'I can get rich.' Said, 'I can make one of them in a day.'

"I said, 'Y'can?'

"'Yeah, yeah.' Said, 'I can make one a day.'

"'Well,' I said, 'when you *get* that, you come and let me know. I need to know how you do it. I need more money.'

"He never did get *nary one* together. Worked at it about four days and laid it down and quit.

"I sell mine myself. They come here [from a co-op], and I told them I just made mine for hobby and if I wanted to give somebody one, I'd give it to him. I don't have to take their price and sell it to you. He said, 'Oh, we'll get you a lot more money!'

"I said, 'Who gets the money? Me or you?'

"'Oh,' he said, 'we get a certain percentage of it.'

"'Well,' I said, 'you'll have t'go some'eres else.'"

In his work, Stanley is painstakingly careful. He refuses to be pressured. Of course, the other thing that slows him down is that every few moments,

PLATE 99



PLATE 100

he stops to tell another story—like the ones following, told as he was sawing slots for the frets on a 'dulcimer' fingerboard. If he had to stop telling stories, he'd probably have to stop making instruments also, for the two are inextricably linked . . .

Be about like one time they was an old man had a boy who was crippled. Been crippled for years and couldn't walk. Come two old Irishmens along, and they was wanting something to eat, and asked something to eat, and the man said, "Well," said, "my wife has t'take care of the crippled son." Said, "She ain't got much time."

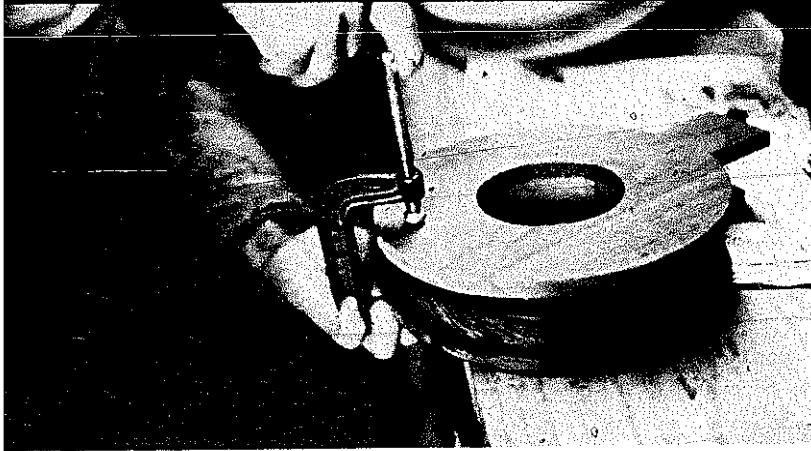


PLATE 101

Stanley's Father's Banjo

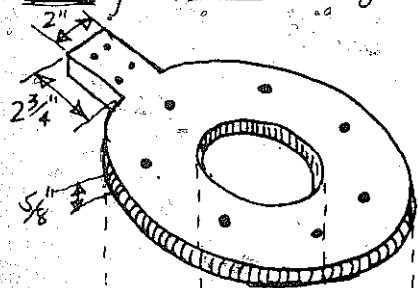
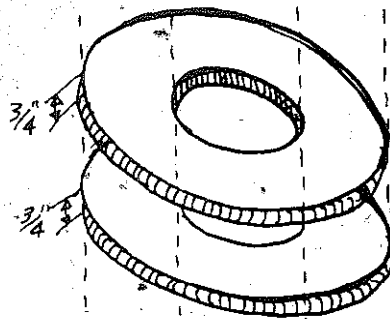
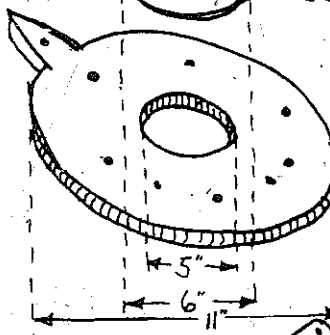


PLATE 102



Two center
rings are
screwed
together
first from
top and bottom
to form hoop
Then top is
added with
screws (•);
then metal
ring and lid;
then bottom
is screwed
on (•)



Note narrow
heel tab. As
the photos
show both
tabs have
split with age

ONE SCREW GOES
THROUGH THE TAILPIECE

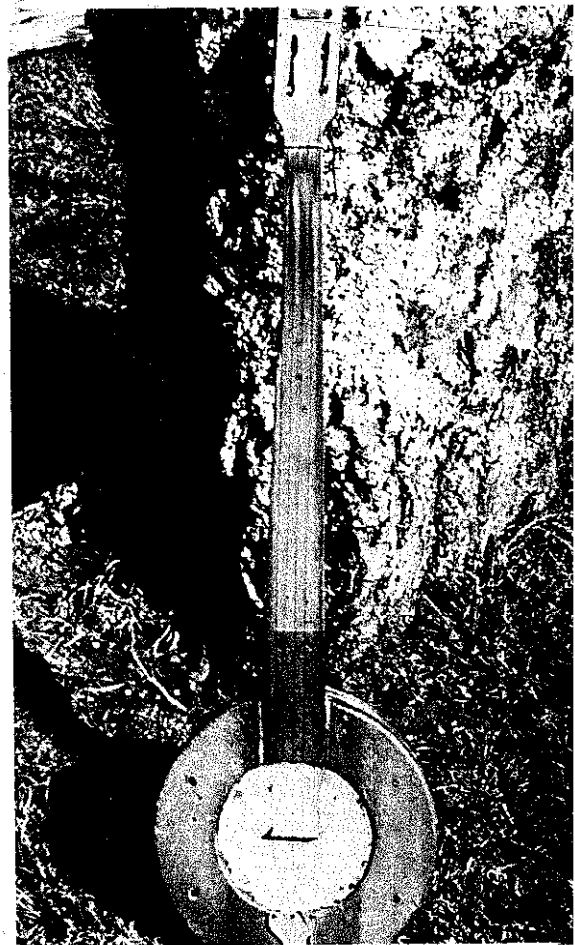
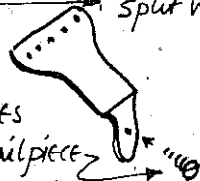


PLATE 103

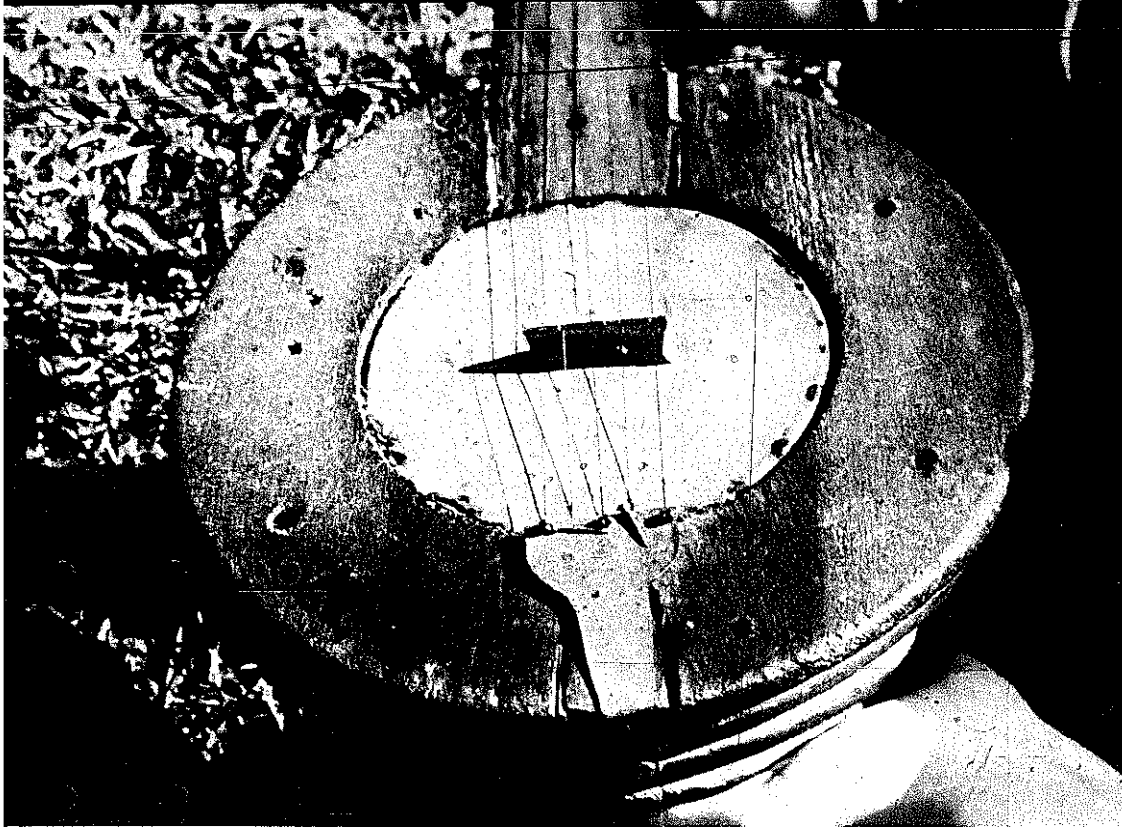


PLATE 104

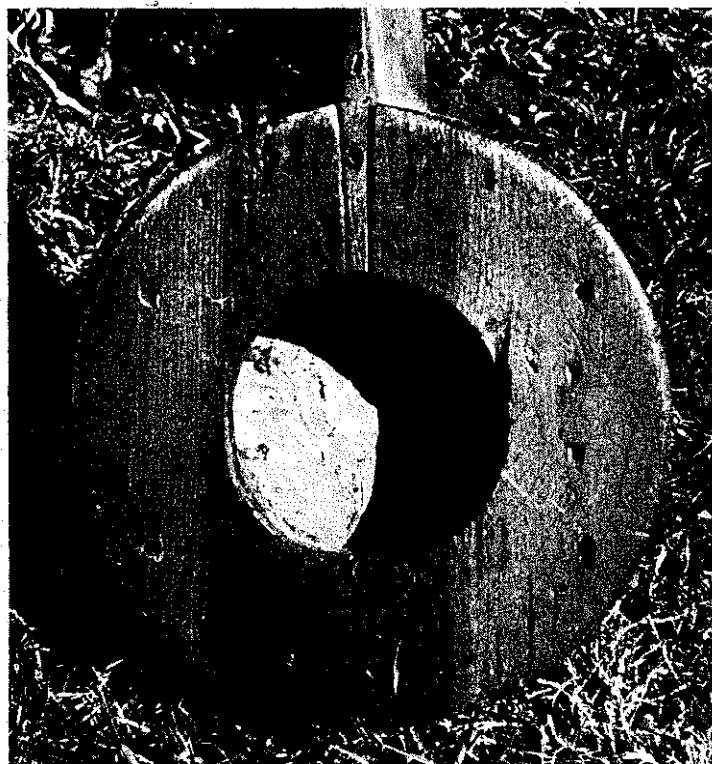


PLATE 105

Said, "What's the matter with'im?"

"Well," said, "he's been crippled for years."

"Well," said, "we'll cure him if you'll give us something to eat. We'll cure'im."

"Well," said, "alright."

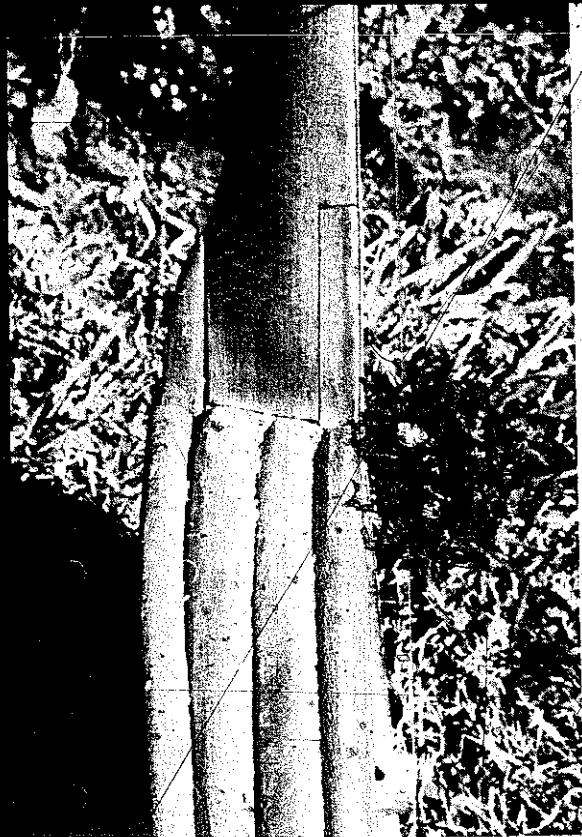


PLATE 106

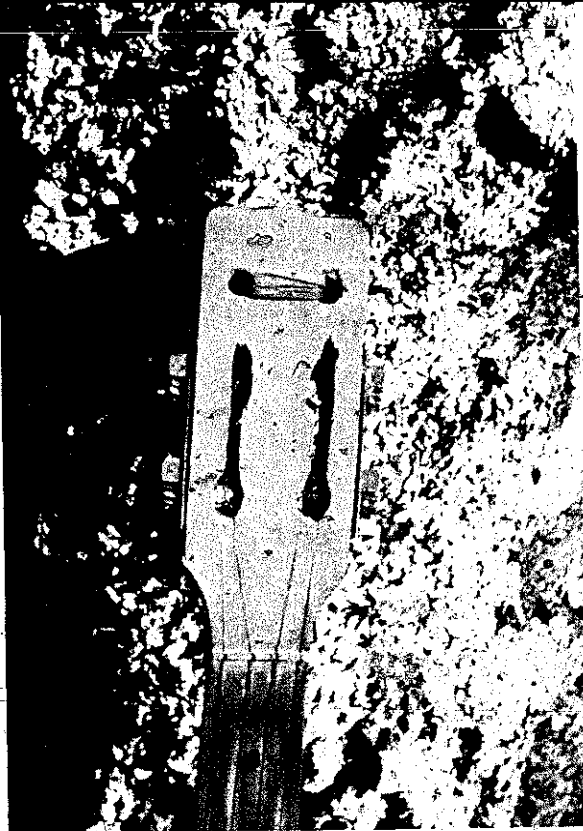


PLATE 107

PLATES 106-108 As Stanley does, his father used to sew his groundhog or cat hides around a ring using thread cut from a squirrel hide. He had a log trough into which he would put four or five hides at once, with ashes and water, to remove the hair. His banjos were all five-string, fretless, and made mostly of poplar, although he also used maple and chestnut. He smoothed the wood with the edge of a piece of glass, or a rasp. They sold for \$2.50 each. The banjo has been modified to hold commercial pegs.



PLATE 108



PLATE 109

Old Irishmens, they went in and got'em something t'eat, "And now," he said, "you'll have t'cure my son."

Said, "We'll cure'im. Put him in a room where he can hear us at." So they put him in a room by hisself, and the old Irishmens got one [right beside]. And got'em a butcher knife apiece, and they started then a'whet-
tin': "R-r-r-r-r, whetty-whet-r-whet whetty-whet r-r whetty-whet-whet."

Said, "Sharp enough t'cut his head off?"

Said, "No, not quite."

Boy had raised up, y'know. Watched'em through a crack.

"R-r-r whetty-whetty-whet." Said, "Sharp enough t'cut his head off yet?"

Said, "No, not hardly."

Well, they looked through the crack and he'uz almost raising up in the chair. And they started again: "R-r whetty-whet whetty-whet r-r whetty-whet whetty-whet." Said, "Sharp enough t'cut his head off yet?"

"Yeah," he said, "I think we're sharp a'plenty." Said, "Jerk th'door and let's go get'im."

They jerked the door open, and he run out the other; and as fer as I know he's still running yet! He just cleaned the door hinges off and got out of there!

That's the way this is [sawing frets for his dulcimer]. R-r whetty-whet!

I guess a man would feel kindly funny, you know, them whetting on knives! They said that was true.

Then they was two more Irishmens going along the road and looked up in a tree and saw a boomer. Said, "You go get a pot t'cook it in and I'll have it caught when you come back."

The Cake Box Banya:

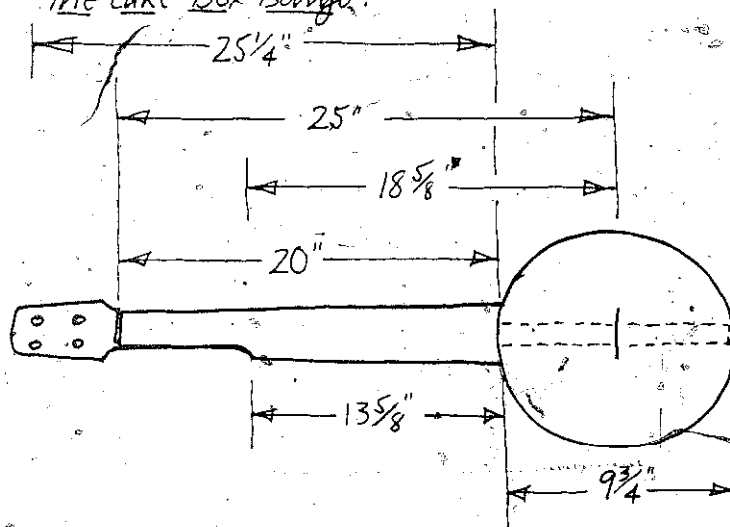
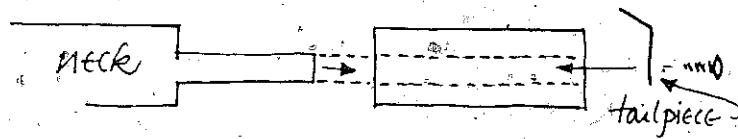


PLATE 110



One screw goes through tailpiece into end of neck extension. A 4 1/2" sound hole is cut into the bottom of the cake tin.

PLATE 111

PLATE 112

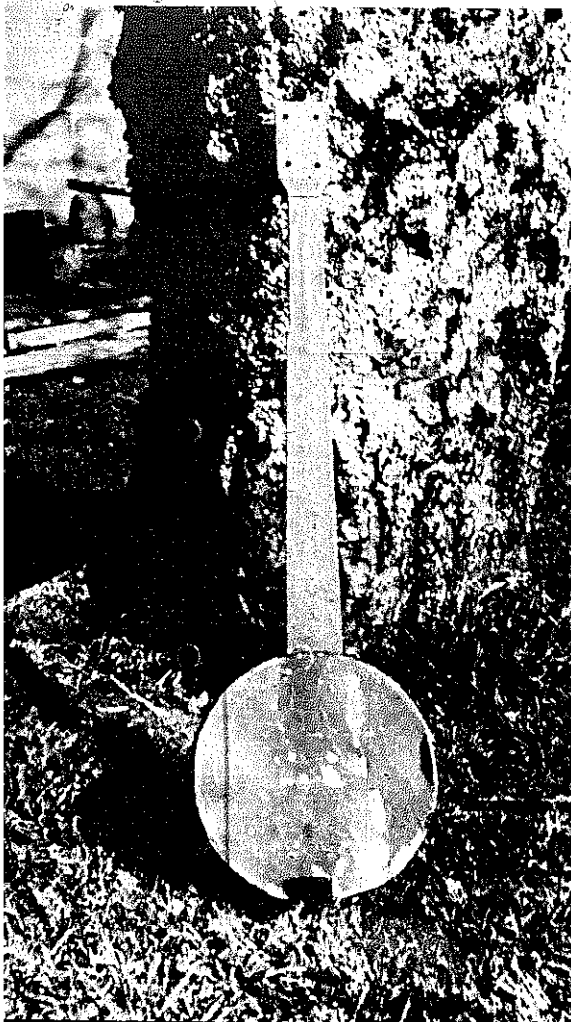




PLATE 113

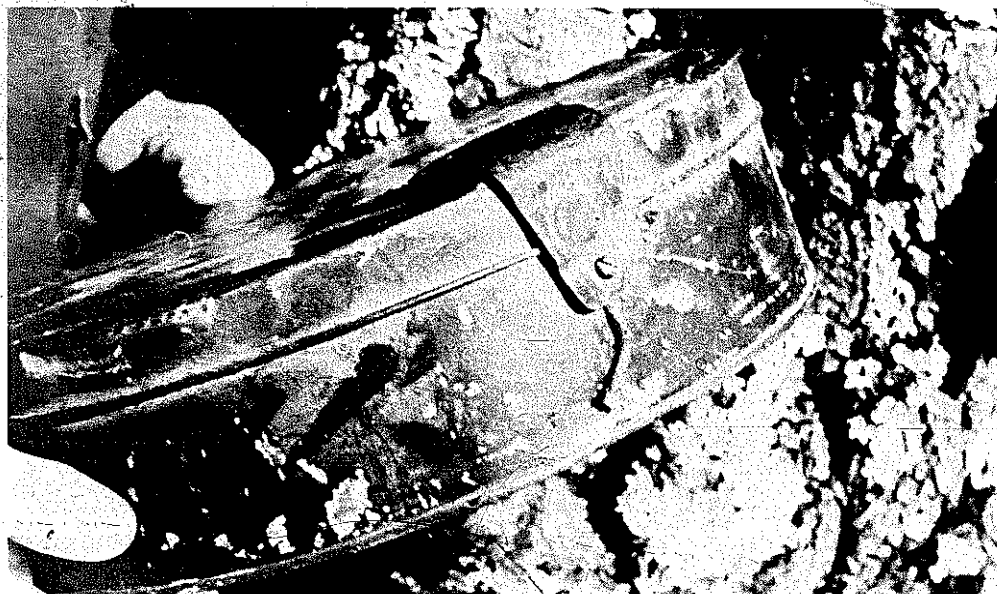


PLATE 114



PLATE 115

Well, this old Irishman, he took off t'get'em a cook pot. And he got his pot and went back, and th'other Irishman's layin' down in th'road with blood runnin' out of his mouth. And he looked at him right straight and he said, "You must'a been awful damn hungry," he said, "t'eat it raw!"

He'd made a jump y'know, to get where the squirrel was at, and his legs wadn't long enough and he'd hit the ground!

After he showed us the banjos, Stanley brought out a game he had made (Plate 116).



PLATE 116



PLATE 117



PLATE 118



PLATE 119

"We used to make these [pecking birds]. See, here it goes! [As he swings the paddle and the birds peck, he sings/chants the following]:

Chicken in the bread bowl peckin' out dough.

Granny, won't your dog bite? No, chile, no.

No, chile, no.

Chicken in the bread bowl peckin' out dough.

Granny, won't your dog bite? No, chile, no.

No, chile, no. No, chile, no.

"Watch 'em, now! Watch'em. Watch'em. Now, this'n here [pointing a slower one out], he got beat up and we had t'remodel his tail. Y'see him? He looks a little bit *rough*. Now they's supposed to be corn in here, but I ain't put any in yet. That one's a little lazy [pointing at another]. 'At's a rooster. He's just a little lazy, boys. Now them hens is smart, see? Now watch him. He's a little ill there!

"But they's a lot of things that way you make, you know, just while you're beatin' around at it. I've got a snake. And, let's see, where's my 'moisture' at [a paddle with a rough head and a crayfish claw nailed to either side (*Plate 117*)]. And I've got me a bird at the house. My wife, she wouldn't let me keep the moisture at the house. And that bird and snake, I just picked up roots and made them. I'll run down t'th'house and bring'em up here and let you look at'em!" (*Plate 118*).

RAY MCBRIDE

Photographs by Ray and Steve Smith.

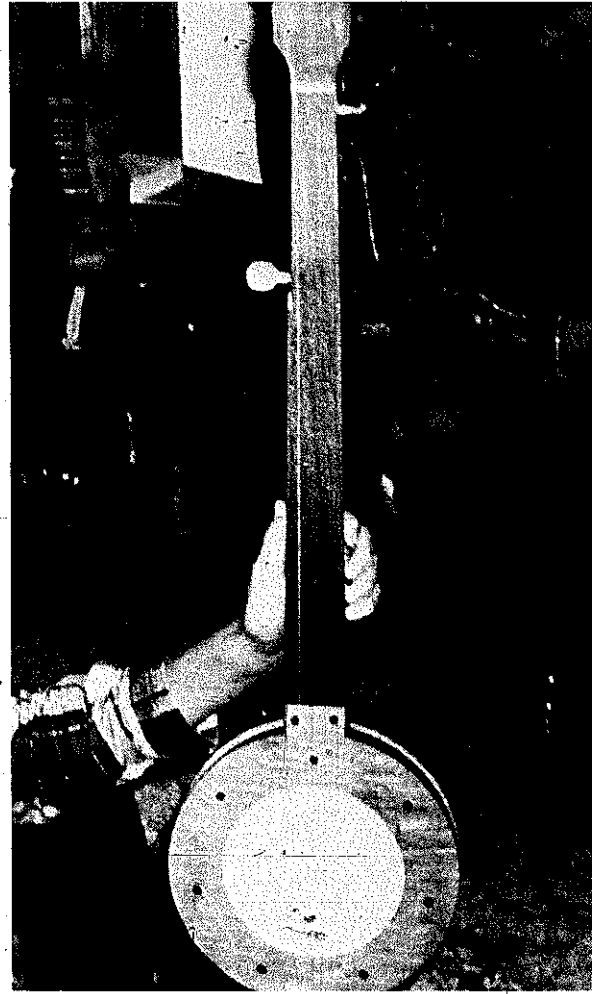
LEONARD GLENN

Leonard Glenn went to school with Tedra Harmon, and they still live almost within shouting distance of each other. He farms tobacco and sells an instrument once in a while to bring in an income for the family. His son, Clifford, also makes banjos and dulcimers.

On the day we visited him, it was rainy and cold, and although we had never met him before, he invited us in and showed us two of the banjos he had made. The one we were most interested in was the one made in the same style as those Tedra and Stanley Hicks made. Glenn got his pattern from his father who made banjos fifty years ago. His father used squirrel hides for the heads because they were thinner than groundhog and deer, and he felt they had better tone. Glenn did the same until recently when he started buying cowhides out of which he could get at least three heads.

When he was using squirrel hides, he'd put them fresh in a vat under about an inch of hardwood ashes and water. When the hair loosened, he'd

PLATE 120



scrape the hides clean, wash them thoroughly, and put them in the banjos immediately.

He could cut out the pieces for the head, the neck (for which he preferred cherry or walnut), and put in a skin in one day. He'd cut the pieces out with a band saw, and cut out the holes for the head and the sound holes with a jigsaw. Finishing work was done with a rasp, wood file, and sandpaper. Pegs were cut out with a jigsaw and then shaped with a pocket-knife. Rather than trying for a high gloss, Glenn preferred simply to rub in a wax for the finish.

He's sold many instruments—some of them ones he didn't really want to sell. He'd set the price at two or three times what he thought they were worth to discourage buyers, but someone always came along with a check-book.

RAY MCBRIDE

Photographs by Ray and Steve Smith.

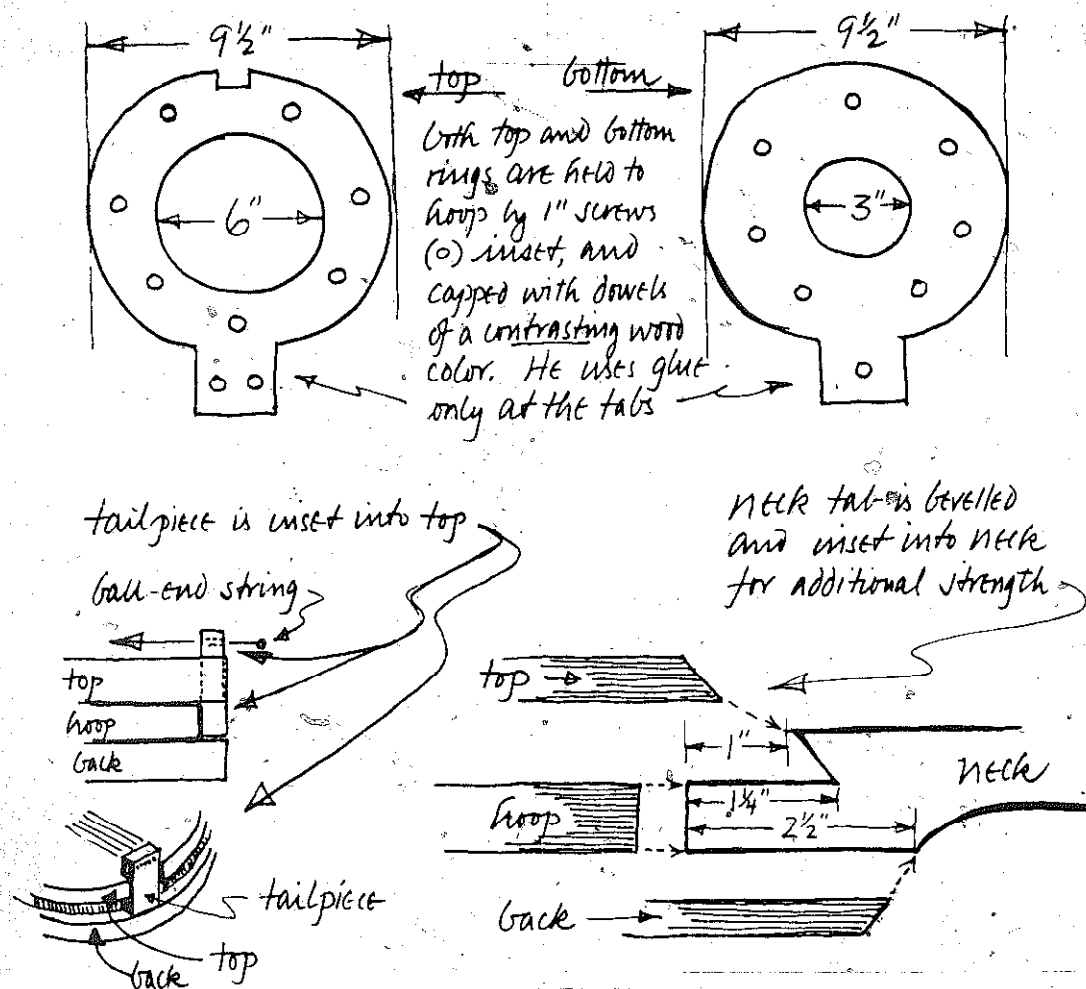


PLATE 121 The banjos that Leonard Glenn makes are similar in construction to those of both Tedra and Stanley (three wooden rings, a metal ring to hold the head, no neck-extension, etc). There are several differences worth noting, however, as shown.

PLATE 122



DAVE PICKETT

Dave Pickett is thirty-one years old and was born and raised in Davidson County, North Carolina. Both his great-grandfather and grandfather were blacksmiths, and his father was a machinist and gunsmith—all with their roots in the same county.

Dave has always been restless, searching for the livelihood that suited him best. He tried farming—he was raised on a farm, has worked a team of horses, and raised tobacco and grain—then he took two years of machine work in trade school, and later returned to school and earned an Associate Degree in mechanical engineering. He worked seven years in technical writing, the last three years of which were spent building prototypes of textile air conditioning equipment from engineering drawings. Now he makes banjos and folk toys for a living, has a garden, and makes home brew. Finally he's happy.



PLATE 123



The posts are set so that every 4th one passes through a lap joint to help strengthen it.

Dave's 3" high, 11" hoop is made of 8 separate lap-jointed pieces of a hardwood like maple. The pieces are glued together in matching pairs, and then the pairs are glued together to form a perfect

PLATE 124

circle. Then the whole hoop is turned and finished, and the posts and brackets set, and the hole cut for the neck extension (tail). There are 31 posts and 30 brackets (the 31st post is where the tail piece is set at the neck's tail). They are spaced $1\frac{1}{16}$ " apart.

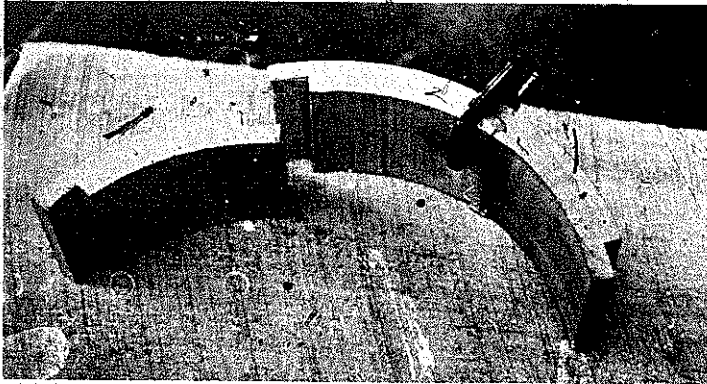


PLATE 125

PLATE 126

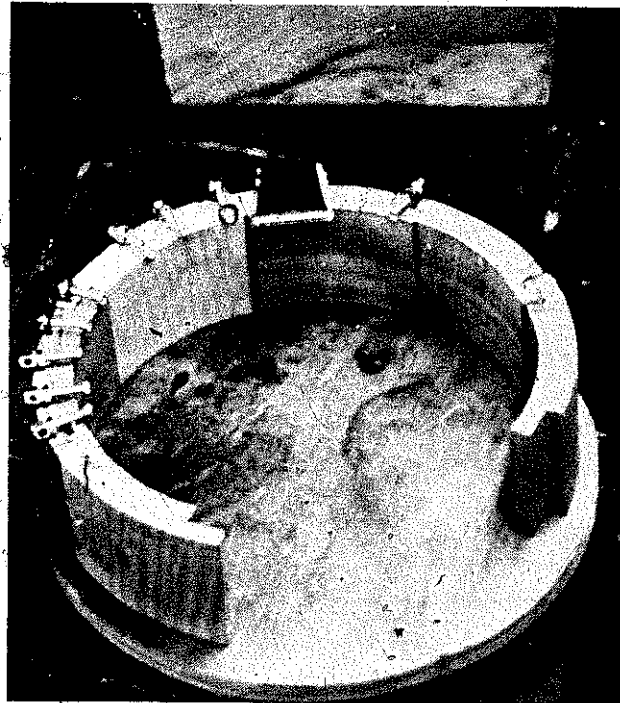
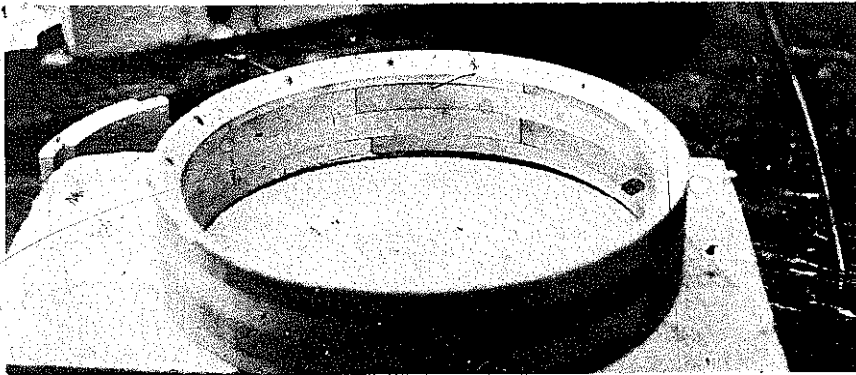




PLATE 127 Dave has his pieces figured out so carefully that he can get every wooden piece he needs out of one 40" x 3" x 3" piece of stock.

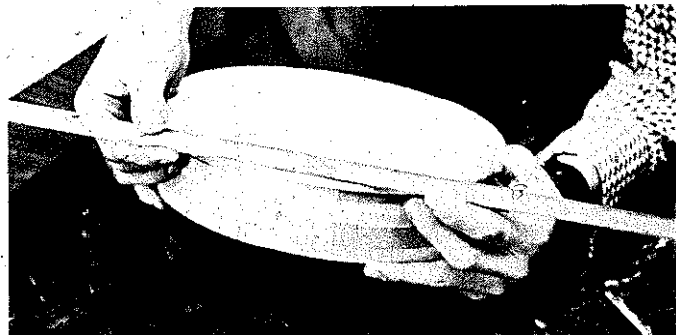


PLATES 128-130 These plates illustrate another hoop style that Dave has used in the past.



PLATE 129

PLATE 130



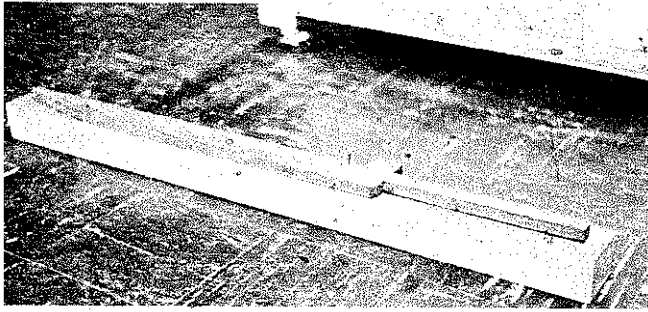


PLATE 131

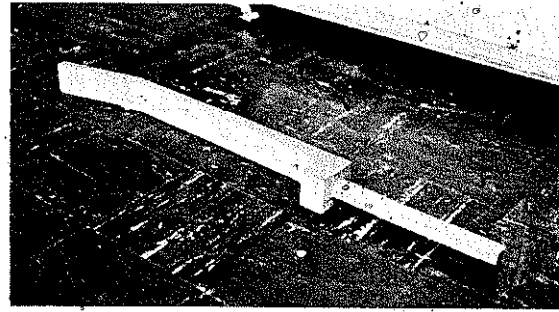


PLATE 132



PLATE 133

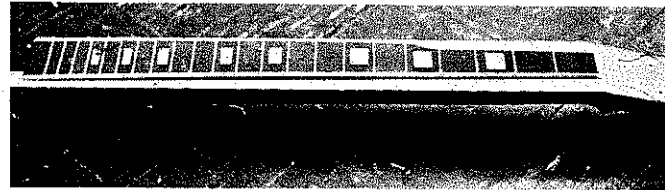


PLATE 134

PLATES 131-134 The pattern for the side of the neck is traced off on stock and cut out with a band saw (Plates 131, 132). Then top is traced off and cut (Plate 133). A slot is cut in the top of the neck to hold a steel rod that acts to counter the tension of the strings. The fingerboard covers the slot (Plate 134).

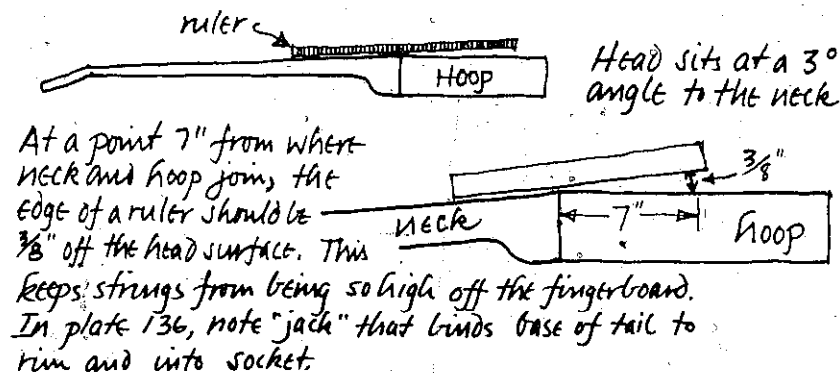


PLATE 135

Dave got started making banjos entirely by accident. He had always wanted to learn to play one, but he couldn't afford to buy one. A man he worked with came to him for some help in figuring out how to turn a banjo rim, and he got involved in the project and decided to go ahead and draw out diagrams for a complete instrument. He worked on them for a year polishing and perfecting every angle and joint, and then he built one. It was an impressive success.

He originally planned to build just that one, but people kept pestering him to build one for them also, so he finally quit the engineering job, opened a little shop with several other craftsmen in Winston-Salem (they

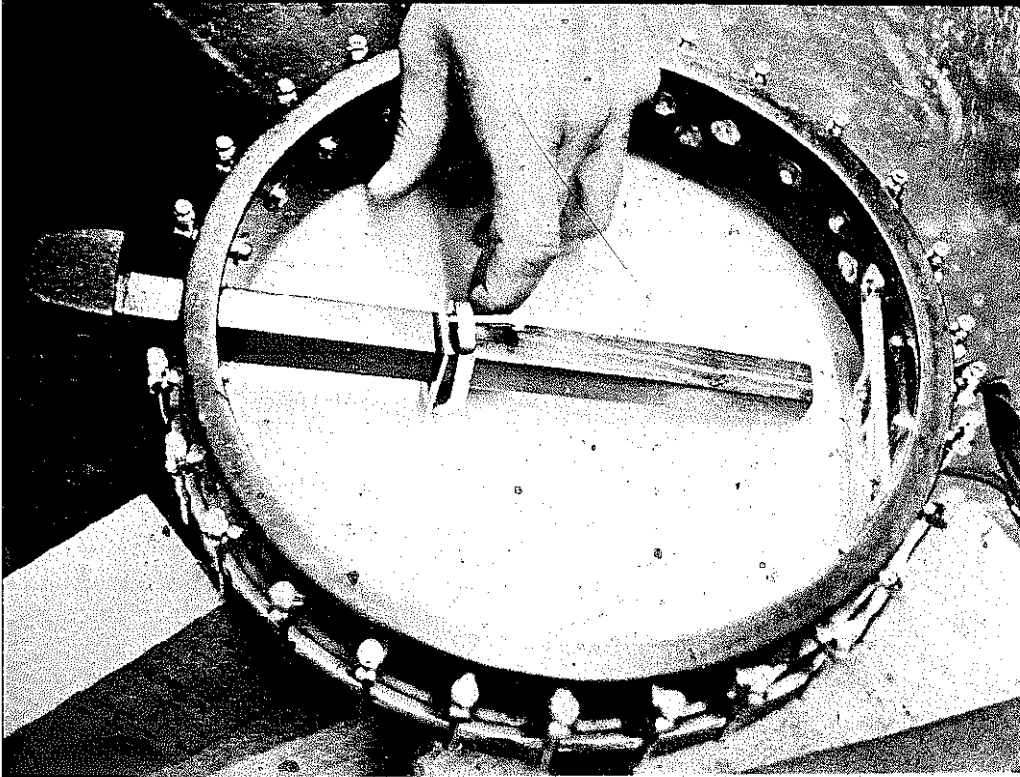


PLATE 136

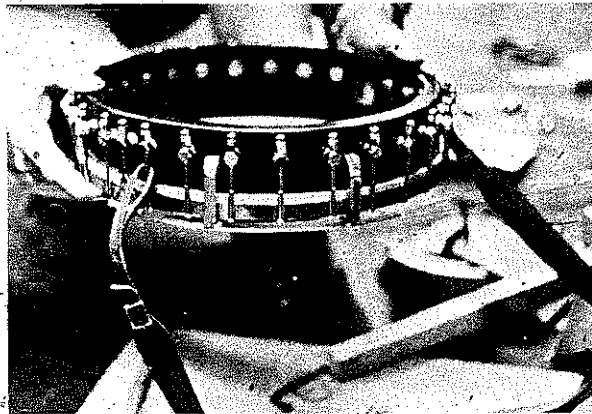


PLATE 137



PLATE 138

The Sweeney Banjo

PLATE 139

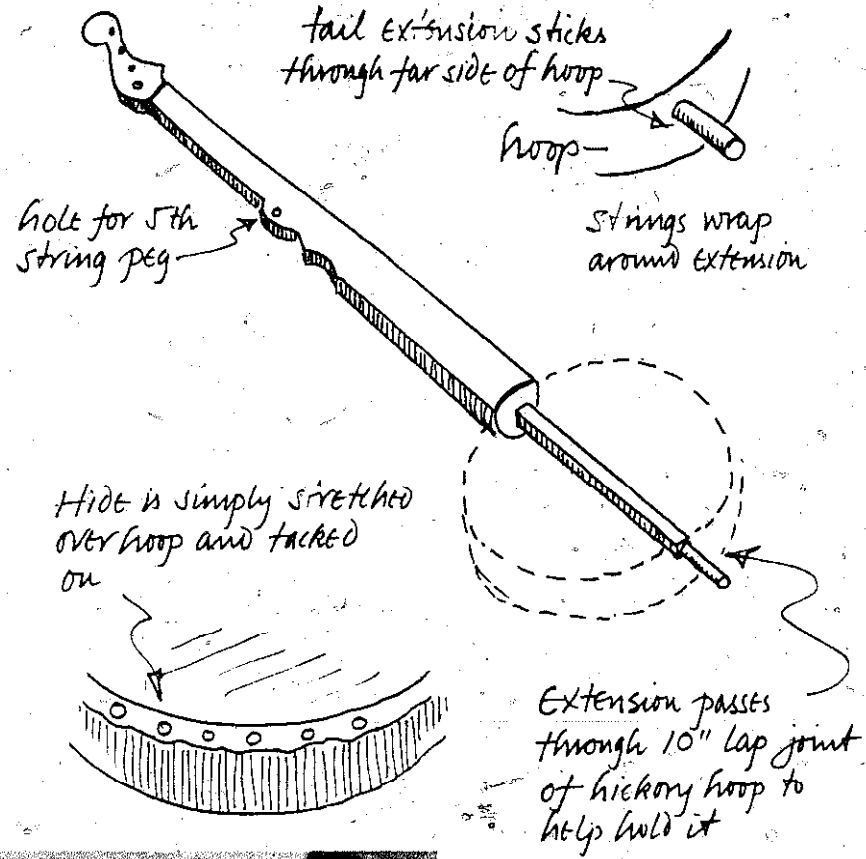


PLATE 140

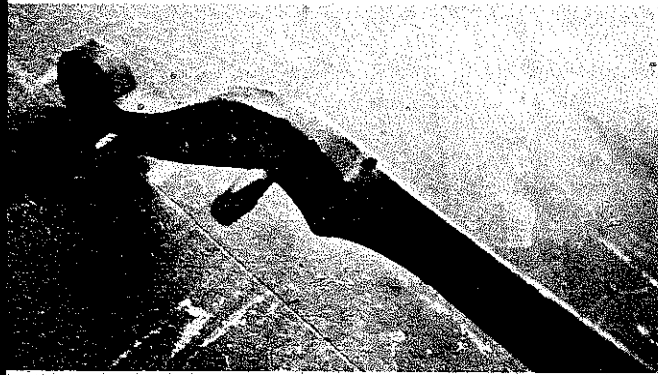


PLATE 141

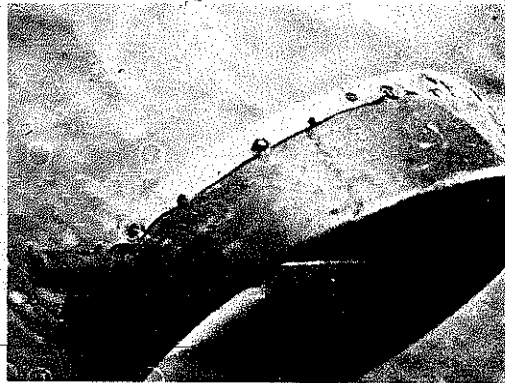


PLATE 142

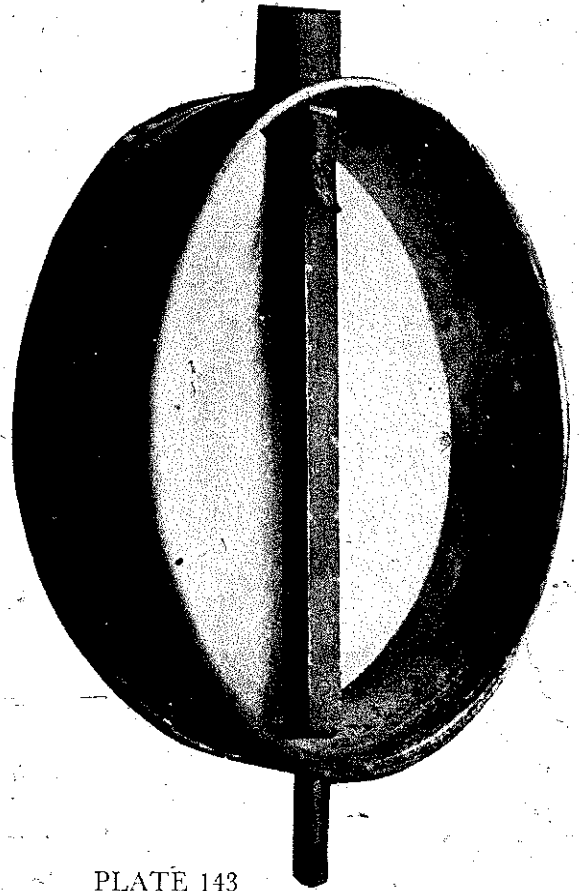


PLATE 143

share the rent and tools), and stuck strictly to banjos and folk toys. He guarantees the toys such as limberjacks, for a lifetime.

It took a lot of moving around to find satisfaction but it turned out that none of the jobs he had tried during his restless period were a waste of time. He used his knowledge in engineering to design one of the finest banjos we've ever seen. Being raised on a farm he knows how to—and does—produce enough food in his garden to feed his family. And using his skills in machine work he can manufacture almost every part needed for his instruments.

He sells the finished banjos for about \$300.00 apiece (unless the customer specifically requests him to design and make parts such as the tailpiece and fingerboard himself instead of using commercial ones. In this case, the price goes up). It sounds expensive, but even at that price, Dave is lucky if he comes out making fifty cents an hour:

"I haven't made a fortune, but I haven't starved, either. What more can a person ask out of life. The main thing is I enjoy what I'm doing. I believe in enjoying what you're doing. I come in at 8:30 or 9:00 of a morning, and you're liable to find me here at 10:30 or 11:00 at night be-

cause I *want* to work; not because I have to. If things go bad, I just lock the door and go squirrel hunting or fishing. You set your own schedule. I have no one working for me. Everything I produce is totally from me. No outside help. Main reason is that I'm kind of a bad person to work for. People just can't do the work like I want it done. I've tried to have a few people help me, but all they can do is assembly work. As far as making the parts, there's just no way. Why pay somebody to do it and then have to do it over?"

He is always experimenting, improving and working on new ideas. Dave now plans to try his hand at something he gets many requests for—an old-style fretless banjo. It will be easier to build—and thus not as expensive—as it will have fiddle pegs instead of commercial ones, and it won't need the metal reinforcing bar in the neck—the fretless banjo is tuned lower and so the tension on the neck is less.

But if what he's doing now is any indication, the quality will still be flawless.

RAY MCBRIDE

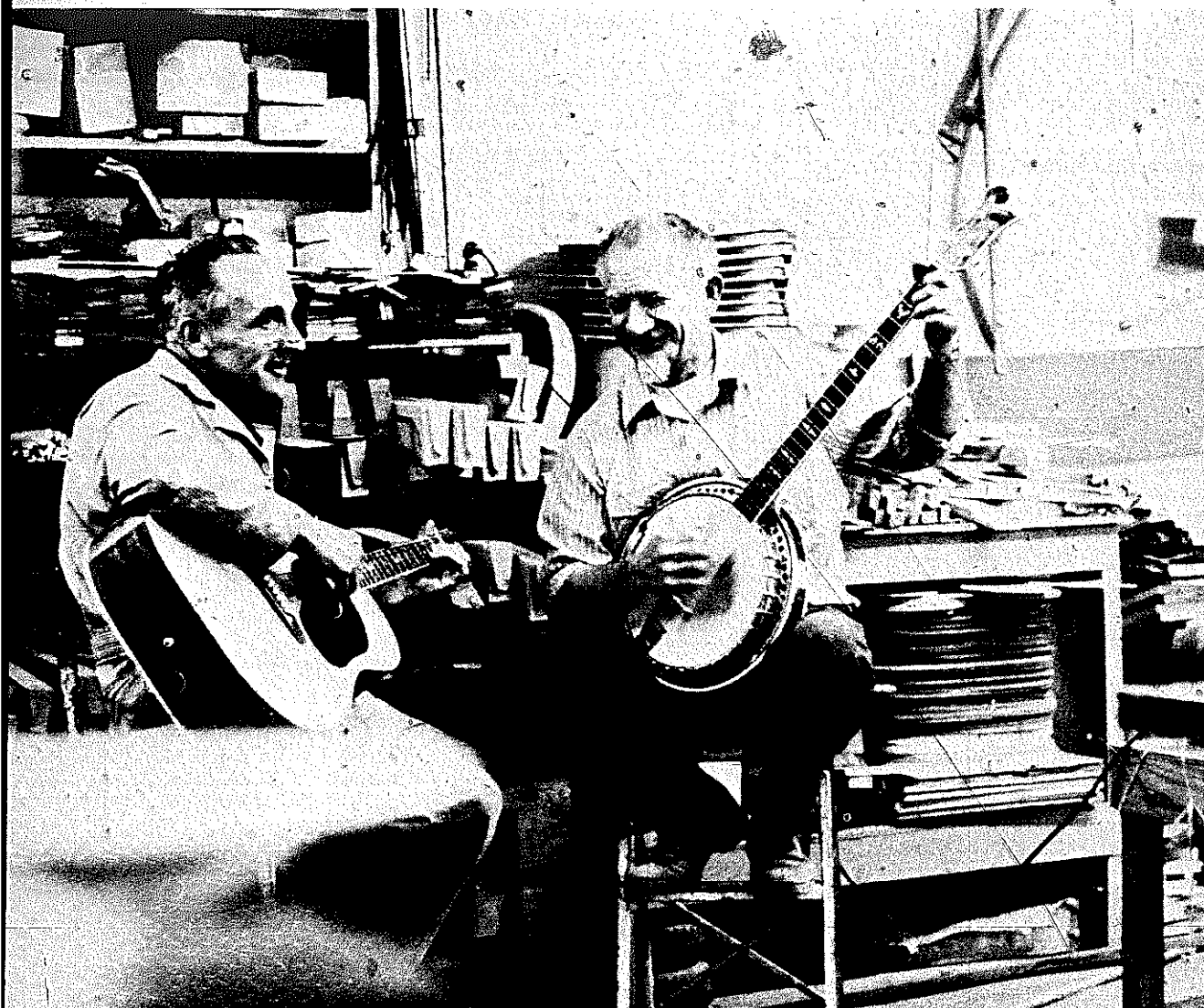
Photographs by Ray and Ernest Flanagan.

DAVE STURGILL

Dave Sturgill's roots in Piney Grove go back to the time of the Indian. Unlike many of his ancestors, however, he spent a large portion of his life away from the mountains. After he graduated from high school during the Depression, he began to wander, covering the country from New York to San Francisco. "I got my education by traveling, and of course one of the things I was interested in, even then, was music, so I carried my instrument and played in clubs to make a little money."

In 1938, he wound up in Washington, D.C., went to school for a year, worked for the Western Electric Company, and then moved to the Bell Telephone Company. He stayed with them for twenty-nine years in Washington, and was a general engineer in switching equipment when he left. He was fourteen months away from retirement, he had a wife and sons, "But my heart never left the hills. This was where I always wanted to be. There were riots in Washington then, and these hills looked so good every time I came down here that I finally came down here and stayed." He

PLATE 144



The Sturgill Mountain Banjo Kit

Plate 146 shows the pieces that come with the Sturgill kit, as well as an example of the finished banjo the kit produces. There are several variations here (most incorporated from traditional instruments Dave has seen, such as those in the following plates) that we have not previously noted: the thin hoop, for example, that fits into corresponding grooves on the inside of the top and back.

Note also that the commercial 6" head is held into place by a wooden ring, which is in turn held in place by 5 wooden blocks nailed or screwed into the underside of the top. Note also the tailpiece—simply 3 brass brads driven into the top. The strings hook around their heads. Design and cut your own sound holes. Has fretted fingerboard. The diagrams that come with the instructions in the kit:

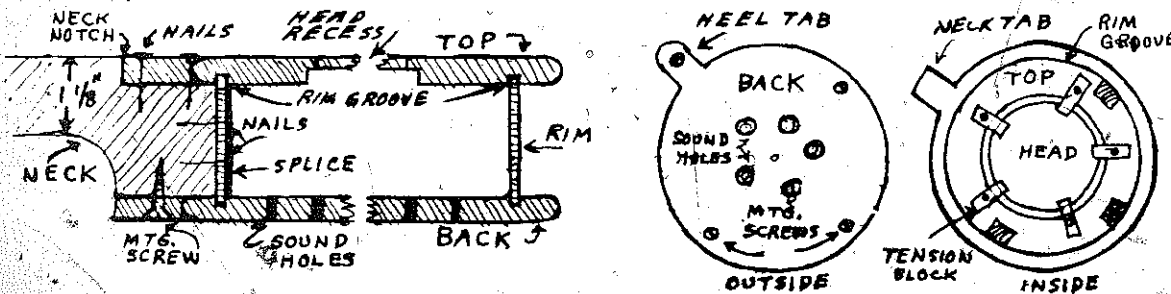


PLATE 145

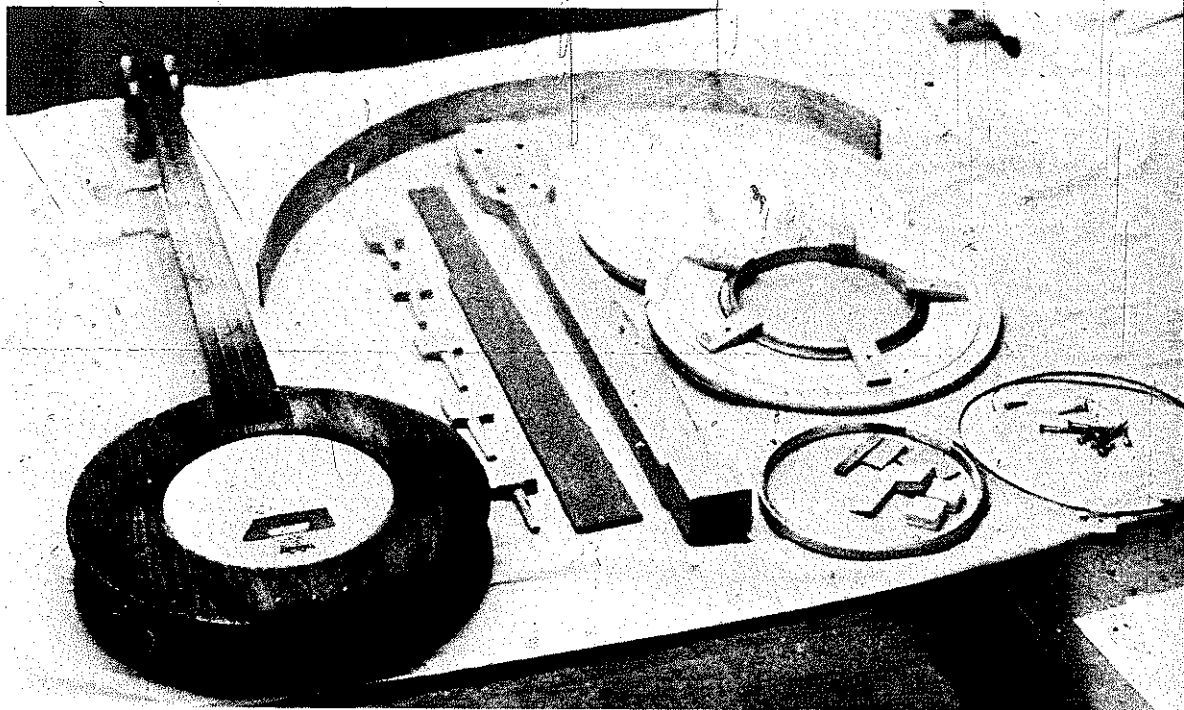


PLATE 146